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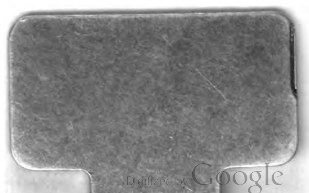
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ON
THE STATE OF MAN BEFORE
THE PROMULGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY

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Small Books on Great Subjects.

EDITED BY A FEW WELL WISHERS

TO KNOWLEDGE.



Nº. XIV.



ON
THE STATE OF MAN BEFORE
THE PROMULGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY



Cornwallis,
(Cardinal Francis)

LONDON
WILLIAM PICKERING
1848





ON
THE STATE OF MAN BEFORE
THE PROMULGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY.

INTRODUCTION.

THE history of man as a race is like that of an individual, marked by particular epochs in which the very character of his existence undergoes a change, and in which, notwithstanding that his passions, affections, and appetites, remain the same, their object is so far changed that the mature man and the boy are not more dissimilar than the people of one age are from those of another.

Such changes are generally accompanied rather than caused by a political convulsion as great as the moral one; so that when the men of the succeeding generation glance back towards the days of their fathers, they find themselves

separated from them by a chasm so immense, that the objects on the other side look dim and strange. We have a good example of this sort of moral earthquake almost within our own days: the twenty-five years of revolution and warfare in Europe which followed upon the popular outbreak in France, in 1789, seemed to place an interval of centuries between the last and the present age. Science, language, manners, dress, habits of life and thought, governments and boundaries of countries, have all undergone such a change, that the books of the eighteenth century are now only to be regarded as curiosities, which may tell what was the state of the world in that apparently remote time when steam was but an indication that water was boiling, and chemists prattled about phlogiston; when fowling-pieces were primed from a powder-horn; when there was but a mule road over the Alps, and the transit to India occupied six months; when men wore laced coats, and women hooped petticoats; and when Richardson's lengthy novels, and Hume's meagre history, were held up as patterns of perfection in their way. It needs but to look through a library formed in the last century to show that the completeness of this revolution of ideas and

of things is not here exaggerated. Scarcely a book will be found available for present use, farther than as a record of the state of knowledge and manners in former times.

If, then, an event of comparatively common occurrence has held so large an influence over the social progress of the world, we, who have seen this, are the more capable of conceiving what must have been the effect of one which has no parallel in the history of mankind; when the Deity himself looked through human eyes upon the ways of men, and spake through human lips to condemn them. At his voice, though gentle and quiet as the still air that scarcely stirs the leaf before the storm begins, the whole state of the world was changed: superstitions shrunk from the light; empires crumbled; the wild north was roused into sudden and strange energy, and three or four hundred years did the work of as many thousands.

Could a Greek, nurtured in the palmy days of Athens, have risen from his grave and visited Rome under the Cæsars, he would not have found any very striking difference in the character of the civilization he would have witnessed: the edifices of the imperial city were still an imitation, even though an awkward one,

of the Greek architecture; the houses, the theatres, the feasts, the philosophy, the military arms and tactics, all had a decidedly Grecian air; roughened, it is true, by a rougher people, but still tending to the same point. The political institutions, even, differed not much: the Roman citizen was as important a personage, and had nearly as many privileges as the Athenian, or the Spartan; and like them was served by foreign slaves: the religion was the same in its pomp, its sacrifices, and its grossness; and Athens was still the school where the Roman youth sought wisdom and polish. But count five hundred years downwards from the death of the last of those charged with the message of God to man, and what was the state of things? Let a senator from the court of the Antonines awake in that of Pepin; what would he see there? Shaven monks; bishops who bearded kings; nobles who despised literature; and could not even sign their names; the well-disciplined infantry which had determined the fate of empires replaced in great measure by an irregular cavalry, clad in mail; the couches of the eating-room replaced by hard benches, where these mailed warriors sate to satisfy hunger, not to gratify a fastidious palate; and where their

dames, as hardy as themselves, shared the feast, and, not unfrequently, the arms also of the other sex ; churches unlike any thing that Greece ever saw, but with their own peculiar character of splendour, replacing the temples of a few ages back ; a Christian Bishop, calling himself the servant of the servants of Christ, and parading his humility on all occasions, occupying the place of the Cæsars ; the citizen degraded to a serf ; the laws of property altered ; and this change had taken place in every spot where the Roman eagles had towered, save in the precincts of the effete coast of Constantinople ; and even there the title of Cæsar was but an empty name, and the more than Median effeminacy of the Eastern Emperors had nothing in it which could at all remind the beholder of the ancient glories of Rome. Every thing spoke of a new æra, and very soon the heroes, and even the writers, of a few ages back, were shrouded in the mists of fable. Virgil, if spoken of at all, was known only as a skilful magician ; and the great Julius himself, as a knight of renown in some former age, long past the memory of man.

But the very immensity of this change has prevented us from seeing it in its true light : we are the men of the new æra, and instead of

viewing the old as a period disjointed from us by its institutions, its habits, its very modes of thinking and reasoning, we thoughtlessly measure ancient times by our own. Whoever has been in the habit of studying the pictures of Giotto, and other early masters, or the illuminated manuscripts of the middle ages, will have smiled often at the odd confusion produced by the costume assigned to the personages there represented; where Roman and Greek warriors figure as good knights in visors and plate armour, and citizens of Athens or Rome are attired in furred gowns and barret caps. Yet, though we laugh at this, it is but the sensible manifestation of what is passing in the minds of most persons; for though a painter might not now be guilty of any such gross mistakes in costume, still, in thinking of the men of other times, we are apt to impute to them so much of our own manners and opinions, that we might nearly as well lend them our swallow-tailed coats and cravats also.

The mind, like the body of man, will never depart entirely from its original type: but, nevertheless, outward institutions will mould it to a manner of thought very much differing in different ages; and until we have taken all these

adventitious circumstances into consideration, it is hardly possible to arrive at a true understanding of the events recorded in history. It is thus that the books of Scripture which were addressed to men of other times, formed under different institutions, and consequently having different modes of thought, became almost unintelligible to persons who read without making any such allowance for the mental refraction of a bygone age.

To do this was indeed at one time a very difficult task, from the want of sufficient data ; but that want is now in great measure removed ; the flood of light which has been poured upon ancient monuments and times, by the enterprize and research of modern travellers, has given us so much, both of the *physique* and the *morale* of those periods, that the tracing the state of the world before and after the great moral disruption occasioned by the advent of Christ, is comparatively easy.

From various causes, however, this has not been done, or, at any rate, not done effectually ; for here, as in other things, party, that most fatal of all enemies to calm research, steps in, and minds heated with controversy, view even facts under such different lights, that it is diffi-

cult to gather from such writings an impartial account of that great revolution in human affairs. Yet without a full knowledge of the state of society previous to the appearance of Christ on earth, we can ill judge why the immediate interference of the Deity was needed at that time more than any other ; nor can we without such a knowledge form any just conception of what that interference effected.

Man had already tenanted the earth during some thousands of years when that child was born whose mission was to produce effects so incalculably great, that even yet, probably, we are but seeing the beginning of them. Why was that mission so long delayed ? Why, if the light then afforded was so necessary to man, was he left to grope in darkness till then ? These are questions which have not unfrequently been urged by those who are ill-inclined to believe in a revelation which speaks "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," and (not without a show of reason) against the assertors of the total corruption of man, and of his utter inability to approach God acceptably, save through Christ. Many answers have been devised to these questions ; the true one has seldom been given since the time of Paul and

Barnabas,* who told the deluded people, who would have sacrificed to them as gods, that though "the Living God who made heaven and earth" had, "in times past, suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, nevertheless, he left not himself without a witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; filling our hearts with food and gladness:" an assertion again confirmed by the same Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans,† where he insists that the men of the age preceding Christ were "without excuse;" because "what may be known of God" had been taught them, not verbally indeed, but in the works of creation; and they had wilfully departed from the worship of the Creator, "whom they knew."

There would have been less room for the carpings of unreasonable scepticism had later writers followed more closely in the track of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and acknowledged that God was not without a witness, even in those earlier times, when men had to work out their own faith from a careful review of the world they were placed in. It might then, probably, have been satisfactorily proved, that the

* Acts xiv. 17.

† Rom. i. 19, &c.

light of real religion had not been extinguished in the world till very shortly before that sun arose which was never again to set, and that its revival at times, under different preachers of righteousness, had been sufficient to minister to the spiritual wants of mankind during the time which elapsed before the preaching of the Gospel.

Many well-intentioned persons have thought that they enhanced the value of the revelation afforded to them, by insisting that nothing like it had ever been given to the world before ; forgetting that if such were the case, the justice of the Deity might well be impugned, and he might indeed be held "a hard master" who expected "to gather where he had not strawed." The fact, however disguised or denied by theological writers of this way of thinking, will nevertheless be apparent to all who study ancient writers ; and we feel compelled to acknowledge what the Apostle has taught us in the passages already quoted ; that for those who chose to use the means granted them, there was no truth of the Gospel which was not within their reach. Even the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, (that part of revelation the least likely to develope itself to the mere natural man,) had

almost arrived at a point of certainty in the minds of the more enlightened heathen. The language put by Cicero into the mouth of Cato the elder, no less than that of David, both on the loss of a son, has all the touching reliance of a Christian's faith. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me," says the King of Israel: "*Proficiscar enim non ad eos solum viros de quibus antè dixi; sed etiam ad Catonem meum, quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate præstantior; cujus a me corpus crematum est: quod contra decuit ab illo meum; animus vero non me deserens, sed respectans, in ea profecto loca decessit, quo mihi ipse cernebat esse veniendum: quem ego meum casum fortiter ferre visus sum; non quod æquo animo ferrem; sed me ipse consolabar, existimans non longinquum inter nos digressum et discessum fore,*"*

* For I shall go, not to join those only of whom I have just been speaking, but also my own Cato:—than whom never was there a better man born or one more distinguished for piety; whose body was burnt by me, when, on the contrary, it would have been in the course of nature that he should have done that office for me. Not that his soul then deserted me, but still looking back to me, he departed to those regions whither he knew that I should myself shortly proceed, and I bear the misfortune with fortitude, not because I did not feel it

says the Roman writer while endeavouring to express the sentiments of a bereaved father. St. Paul was right: God had not left the world without a witness of himself and his goodness.

I would willingly impress this truth more strongly than has as yet been done: I would wish that all should gather from the study of ancient times, the lesson which is so pleasant to man's dependent nature,—that God is really the loving Father of ALL; that he “is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him;” and that, though Christianity has the promise, and thus affords a firmer resting-place to the mind, and therefore a greater support under difficulties, yet that the childlike trust of the great and good of old in the power and goodness of Him who had called them into existence, had its value in his sight, perhaps the greater because they had less of certainty, and therefore more of faith.

But this is not the view usually taken:—the knowledge requisite to the formation of an in-

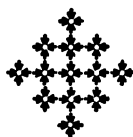
severely, but because I consoled myself with the thought that there would not be any long space between the departure of the one and the other.”

dependent opinion on such matters is possessed by few;—the sources from which it is to be drawn are often hidden in public libraries, which it is always difficult to consult, or in languages which, though taught to many, are generally either imperfectly learned, or again forgotten so far, as to make the reading books written in them a task rather than a gratification. The manners too, of the heathen, corrupt to the point of inspiring disgust, often lead the well intended to neglect their literature, and to wish that others may do the same. This is natural enough; but it is an evil, as every kind of ignorance is; and leads to misapprehensions which are sometimes of evil consequence. Even the abundance of fresh information which has set in upon us like a tide during the present century, almost frightens men by its very extent from beginning to examine into it, and no one seems as yet inclined to attempt the combination of what is to be gained from ancient and modern sources, so far as to supply those who have not the means of research, with what is so much needed. We have histories of the church, histories of philosophy, histories of the ancient empires, and histories of the modern ones; but

a history of man as a rational and moral being, is wanting.

Within the narrow limits which the Editors of the "Small Books" have prescribed to themselves, it is evident that the subject can be but slightly treated; yet it is better at any rate that a beginning should be made, than that a sense of the inadequacy of so short a sketch should altogether prevent the attempt: nay, it is possible that a book which suggests thought, may sometimes be more useful than one which leaves nothing for the mind of the reader to fill up. Be that as it may, the present small work can never be considered in any other light than as a first and very small step towards the supply of a desideratum in literature. Nevertheless, since all seem too busy with the present to attend calmly to the past,—and controversy generally has longer legs than truth, and finishes by out-running her;—encouraged too by the success of the last attempt at compressing a subject as extensive into a narrow space, the Author of the "Brief Sketch of Greek Philosophy," resumes the pen, though with a yet more anxious sense of the importance of the matter to be treated of. The idle talk of humility would be here mis-

placed : he who seeks to instruct his fellow men *sins* if he bring not the whole power of his mind to the subject he proposes to elucidate : he is an instrument in the hands of HIM who wills the happiness of the race he has created, and any paltry vanity of authorship in such a case would be to desecrate his mission, be it great or be it small. The master orders ; it is for the servant to fulfil to the best of his ability the charge he has received.





CHAPTER I.

SYSTEMS OF CIVILIZATION.

ON examining attentively the various systems of civilization which at different periods have united under their banner the greater part of mankind, one broad and striking difference between the ancient and the modern presents itself to the enquirer. Under the first the *animal*, under the second the *spiritual* nature of man is made the subject of chief attention; and this at once gives a distinctive character to the two, which it will be the more interesting to trace, because in it probably, we shall find at once the cause, and the effect of the Divine interference.

It has already been observed that the race of man seems destined to run the career of an individual, though in longer periods; and as the youth rarely learns to condemn the pleasures of sense till he has found by experience how little of satisfaction they afford; so nations needed to

trace their experience also of the inadequacy of the systems which had sensualism for their base, before they would be content to exalt the Unseen and the Spiritual above the Visible and the Tangible. Wealth and power had done their utmost in Egypt, in Assyria, in the Babylonian and Persian empires, and all had fallen :—Greece had cultivated the human animal frame to its utmost perfection, and Greece had fallen :—Rome had carried its military system to the greatest excellence, and Rome was become the slave of its own army.

It was at such a time, when the civilized world lay trembling under the sway of a capricious tyrant, whose will might deprive the most innocent of property and life, that man, weary of such a succession of failures, was likely to accept a system which tended to change the whole aspect of society both in public and in private.

The sensual system had been tried in every possible form for thousands of years, and the human race at large was but little, if at all, advanced :—the Roman power was but a permanent Sesostris, and enslaved nations, groaning under the iron yoke of the conqueror, were well prepared to receive the doctrine that all men

were brethren, possessed of the same rights, and accountable before the same tribunal for the mode in which they exercised them. As man, individually, is here in a state of gradual training for a more perfect life as soon as he has learned to love and to choose it; so nations needed to feel the want of a spiritualized system, ere its promulgation could be available to their benefit: and it was whilst they were trying, and becoming disgusted with sensualism, that God was preparing for them a higher destiny; at the same time that individuals had the means of progress afforded them by the teaching of holy persons, who, from time to time, brought before their eyes the great truths so important to man.

We have but dim records of these teachers, and but mutilated remains of their doctrines; but the extraordinary reform of manners at Cortona consequent upon the public lectures of Pythagoras, may serve to show that their efforts were not without important results. There is scarcely a nation in ancient times which does not boast of having had some such lawgiver; some one who had found them rude and ignorant, and had taught them the arts of civilization, and the worship of the gods, or rather of God; for it is observable that, notwithstanding the

numerous deities which received the homage of the heathen, they seem occasionally, where the Divine Power was contemplated, to have amalgamated the whole into a kind of unity. The christian writers assert that this was the case even with the common people; in the writings of Plato, at any rate, it is apparent; for we find $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ far more frequently than $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\iota$.*

If we look at the effects of the promulgation of the gospel calmly and attentively, we shall soon become aware that these have been more political than moral:—individuals are still licentious, avaricious, cruel, sensual; but *the laws* enjoin temperance, justice, and mercy; and the public rites of religion are pure, even where the ceremonial predominates over the spiritual. No grossness profanes the temples of the christian world; no bloody sacrifice is endured;—and thus the daily *habits* of the people are reformed, even where the heart is little interested in the doctrine which has caused that reform.

As in reviewing the systems of civilization

* It is an unpardonable carelessness, if not worse, in the otherwise clever translation of Plato, published by M. Victor Cousin, that he has rendered $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ by *les Dieux*.

before and after the coming of Christ, we are struck with the contrast between the sensualism and the spiritualism which form their foundation; so, on contemplating the ancient world, we become aware of a difference no less complete between the systems under which the nations of antiquity ranged themselves. They may be termed respectively the *stationary*, and the *progressive*: the first necessarily containing in their very nature the seeds of decay, for with nations as with individuals, not to go forward is to go back; the second as necessarily pushing forward towards the perfection of man's nature, *i. e.* a spiritualized life, and final immortality.

Of these two classes, the Stationary was by far the most ancient; for, till Athens began her restless course of innovation, the object of all legislators appeared to be the exact preservation of the code they had established; nor, whatever may be our opinion as to the mode in which man arrived at the state which ancient monuments and records exhibit, have we any actual trace of a progressive system. Egypt was cut in stone;—the nomade tribes were guided by the traditions of their fathers;—the laws of the Medes and Persians were unalterable;—the Israelitish legislator made no absolute provision

for change, unless we consider as such the attention be spoken for the future prophet, which is to be found in the book of Deuteronomy, or unless we allow the republican form of government established by him, to be such. It was not till the genius of Solon taught him man's power of developement, that, whilst drawing up a code which did not come up to his own notions of what ought to be, but which was the best that the people at that time would receive,—a provision was made for subsequent improvement, by a council which was especially charged with the origination of laws.

Why this immobility should be the favourite object through all the great empires of remote antiquity, is not very apparent, if, as was the opinion of a certain set of speculators in the last century, man had his origin in a state of barbarism which set him little above the beasts of the field. A nation which has within no very long time risen from utter brutality to a state of semi-civilization, would have been likely to have continued its progress to a yet higher point: yet it was exactly at this point of semi-civilization that Egypt stereotyped its laws, its sciences, its habits, and forbade all attempt at further improvement. When we add to this the observa-

tion which we cannot avoid making in our own times, that no barbarous tribe has ever advanced, unaided, to a higher grade;—that, on the contrary, where man's whole powers are taxed for the support of his animal existence, the spiritual is very soon overlooked, and his whole being becomes deteriorated,* we shall feel little inclined to embrace a theory which has no sort of proof to offer,—and shall hope to be allowed to look at ancient times by the light of their own records only.

Whatever be the subject treated of, it always becomes more comprehensible when arranged: I shall therefore avail myself of the distinction already marked out, and class the nations of the ancient world under these two great divisions.

1. Stationary systems, whose laws and institutions forbade all change,
2. Progressive systems, where either a representative, or some other kind of popular government, made provision for the rational alteration of laws, as soon as the occasion called for it.

* Witness the back-woodsman of America; and, as a far more fearful instance of human downward progress, the bush-ranger of Australia.

Egypt may be considered as the head of the first of these two great divisions; Athens as that of the second; and of both, as it happens, we have records so minute that we can form a very sufficient notion of the state of manners, and consequently of thought, among the men of those days.

Before entering on the history of either, it will be needful to form some notion of their chronological relation, and though the subject be so difficult an one, that it is vain to expect to attain any thing more than an approximation to the truth; still a history of man's progress would be very incomplete unless it had some reference to the time during which it had been carried on.

We have been so accustomed from our childhood up to look to the Scriptures as the source of all knowledge, that we shrink with a kind of horror from the discovery that on points of mere science the information there afforded is very incomplete. Were we to reason on the matter, we might indeed conclude that the lessons we have to learn there are not those of astronomy, geology, or, I must now add, of chronology. What these lessons are, the apostle

has taught us,* and those who seek more than he has led us to expect have no right to complain of disappointment, neither should they blame others whose expectations have been less extravagant, if they remain satisfied to gather from the Scriptures no more than the writers promise.

Upon matters of chronology, all ancient records are exceedingly confused, nor are those of the Hebrew nation excepted from the general misfortune. It is not now possible to decide whether the Hebrew text as it now stands, the Samaritan, or the Septuagint version is to be followed where the dates differ; but the general agreement between those of the Septuagint and those of the Jewish historian, Josephus, has led many to suppose that this was the true chronology, and that the later Jews had purposely altered and corrupted the Hebrew manuscripts. This does not appear a thing easy to be done, and yet the alteration is evidently not

* 2 Tim. iii. 16, and it may be well to observe that the word *is* is an insertion by the translators, and that the proper rendering would be "Every writing given by inspiration of God, is also profitable" &c. *Which* writings were so given he does not inform us. See Hammond's Annotations on this passage.

a chance one ; for it consists in adding, in the one case, an hundred years to the first division of the life of each of the patriarchs—or in the other, subtracting a like number. We shall therefore form a more charitable, and, I think a more probable conjecture with regard to the disputed passage, if we suppose that the papyrus roll on which this part was written had become illegible, or had lost some part ; and that it had been restored by the transcriber as best he might, either from conjecture or tradition : the translators, probably aware of this restoration, and doubting its correctness, seem to have altered it again to suit their own views ; and thus we come to have a difference of above a thousand years between the three.

There is no doubt that there were periods in the early career of the Hebrew nation, when both their historical records and law were likely to have been enough neglected to have suffered from casualties in the way I have ventured to conjecture. In the time of Josiah, when Hilki'ah, in his cleansing of the temple, discovered the "Book of the Law" among the rubbish, it was a forgotten code : we have no reason, therefore, to suppose that any especial care had been taken for its preservation, and the book of Genesis,

which formed no part of the law, bears so many marks of having at least been interpolated in the time of the regal sway,* that it is difficult, save by verbal criticism, to discover how much is to be referred to early, how much to later times : and so great are the discrepancies of style, that we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the ancient Hebrew books have in more than one instance been subjected to this restoring process, and that they are in fact a series of fragments of earlier originals. At any rate it is clear that the passage in question is, either from chance or wilful corruption, so little to be depended on, that we can only hope to arrive at the truth by the common means, of a comparison of ancient records and monuments.

If any one shrink from what may seem too daring a criticism, I would beg him to observe that writings of a much later date and more importance, have not been specially protected from the common chances of time and accident. There is scarcely one *complete* manuscript of

* As for instance, Gen. xxxvi. 31, where the mention that "these were the kings, &c. before there was any king in Israel," show that this part at least must have been added not earlier than the time of David. Again, Gen. xiv. 14, where Abraham is said to have pursued his enemies to Dan,—a name not given to the place till long after. See Judges xviii. 29.

the gospels, and what we have now as a published whole, has been collected from various manuscripts, varying also in their readings, in consequence of the mistakes of transcribers. Can it be expected that writings necessarily confided to so frail a material as papyrus, should have sustained less damage than the more durable parchment, during so long a period? I have premised thus much, because, in the sequel, it will appear that this chapter of Genesis and the sculptured stones of Egypt are so far at variance that it seems hardly possible to reconcile the difference; and feeling as I do the deepest reverence for that revelation of God's will which forms the title deed by virtue of which we can lay claim to immortality, I would not be misunderstood so far as to seem to any one careless of the verities of Scripture; but the corruptions or mistakes of transcribers form no part of these verities.

We may now pass on to the consideration of the state of man in the earliest times according to the most authentic records which we possess. Probably these will be found in the paintings within the tombs at Beni-Hassan, which must apparently be dated at a period considerably anterior to Moses, or even to the descent of the Israelites into Egypt.



CHAPTER II.

THE STATE OF MAN UNDER STATIONARY SYSTEMS OF CIVILIZATION.

THE masses of the people in all ages have had two different modes of subsistence; the agricultural, and the nomade. The first necessarily fixed them to one spot; the second as necessarily made them wanderers according to the needs of the herds upon which their own subsistence depended; and whilst there was unoccupied land enough to afford herbage, there was nothing to induce a change in this mode of life. Accordingly, though no law forbids alteration, the habits of the nomade tribes of Asia differ little, if at all, from those of their ancestors: and the Turkoman or Arab chief still welcomes the stranger much in the same way that Abraham is reported to have done. This mode of life was among the earliest: the simple wants of the herdsman were soon supplied, and there was little inducement to study sciences which promised no especial benefit.

The agricultural life, on the contrary, offered many inducements to progress. The tools required for the cultivation of the ground were more useful in proportion as they were more skilfully made; and iron, the best of all metals for the purpose, needed science to extract it from the ore; or if iron were not used, other metals must be prepared and hardened by smelting and mixture. A stationary population would need houses in which to store their implements and their corn; and for the building these, fresh tools and more science were requisite. The agriculturist, engaged all day in the labours of the field, had little time for fashioning his own tools, and very soon a certain portion of the people must devote themselves to the business of supplying the demands of the agriculturist. The earliest traditionary record we possess of the state of man when the earth was first peopled, shews that this was the course of things. The one portion lived in tents, a nomade population; while the artificers built a city, the earliest of all manufacturing towns; and these two schemes of life, as far as we know, were contemporary. The dwellers in tents had seen the dwellers in cities, but preferred their wild independence.

The agricultural state then, was, in its nature,

progressive : luxuries, which a wandering people could neither carry with them nor enjoy, were within the reach of a settled population : trades could be carried on ; the son learned the art which the father had acquired ; it was the natural order of things :—he who was become rich in the produce of his tillage could exchange it with the tradesman for his wares ; and thus he became possessed of two kinds of wealth which descended together to his children. The person thus enriched by the thrift of his fathers could devote his time to intellectual culture, thus science arose.

It is easy to trace this line of progress in imagination ; yet we are forced to confess that it is only in imagination : for by what steps man arrived at the point at which the earliest monuments shew him, we have no means of knowing. Excepting the scanty notice in Genesis of the tradition respecting the sons of Cain, which mark an early division in the mode of life, even of that early people, we are without documents : the Hebrew records give us those only of a part of the nomade portion of mankind ; and it is only accidentally that the great ancient monarchies are mentioned.

One of these monarchies, however, resolved

apparently to secure to itself a perpetuity of remembrance. The monuments of Egypt seem calculated to last out the earth; they are covered with sculptured writing which, though unintelligible for many ages, shows at least that those who erected them intended to make known their doings to future times; and these extraordinary works have at least fulfilled one part of the object of their erection;—they have kept the attention of the world fixed on the singular people who fabricated them; though, till lately, nearly in vain: for since the fall of the Ptolemæan dynasty the sacred writings had become a dead character, and even the elder Plinius seems to have had but a slight notion of the age and purpose of the pyramids.

It was impossible not to feel some curiosity with regard to works so stupendous; yet the sources from which we could draw any information were so scanty, and so evidently mixed with fable in many instances, that the separation of truth from falsehood seemed almost impossible. The following may be named as the chief sources of information (independent of the monuments) remaining to us on the subject of the history, customs, and national works of the Egyptians.

1. The books of the Hebrew scriptures: valuable as far as their notices go, but which mention the affairs of Egypt only incidentally, when they happened to be interwoven with those of the Israelites.

2. Herodotus; who travelled into Egypt and who professes to have received much of what he records from the mouths of the priests of that country. He died about the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, B. C. 430.

3. Manethon; a priest of Sebennytus, who lived in much honour under the first Ptolomæus, the son of Lagus, and wrote a chronicle of the kings of Egypt, fragments of which have been preserved by Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, who wrote about A. D. 71:—by Julius Africanus, a priest or bishop of Emmaus Nikopolis in Judæa, about the beginning of the third century; of which we have only a few fragments remaining:—by Eusebius, bishop of Neo Cæsarea, who wrote in the fourth century; and finally, by Georgius Syncellus, A. D. 800; who criticises Eusebius rather severely, and accuses him of occasionally falsifying Manetho's records. The work of Eusebius is extant also in an Armenian version, which varies occasionally from the Greek copies.

4. Eratosthenes; who was born about B. C. 276, in the beginning of the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, and who was made the keeper of the Alexandrian library. He was a man of extraordinary learning and acuteness in nearly all sciences, and was appointed by the king to write a work on Egyptian history. Syncellus has preserved to us his list of "Theban Kings," extending over a period of 1076 years. This work was first published to the world by

5. Apollodorus, the Athenian; who was the scholar of Eratosthenes. To his master's work he added some farther lists of kings, whose *names* unfortunately have been omitted by Syncellus in his extracts, though he has noted the number of them.

6. Diodorus Siculus; who lived about the time of Julius Cæsar, and who, after the example of Herodotus, has written much respecting the ancient Egyptians, but with fewer opportunities of information.

For a long time these authors, with the exception of the Hebrew, gained but little credence: for it was argued, plausibly enough, that persons living so long after the times which they professed to give an account of, were but little to be depended on as historians: but when the

fortune of war threw what is generally known as the Rosetta stone into the hands of the British army, and scientific industry had obtained by its aid a key to much of the ancient sacred character of Egypt, it was found that its monuments had gained a tongue, and there was no longer any doubt that the learned writers under the early Ptolemies had had access to the most authentic of all records, namely monumental inscriptions, and even contemporary written documents.

These inscriptions, and many of the documents have descended to us ;—till now a dead letter, but now beginning to give forth their information after a silence of nearly two thousand years. What then is the tale that they tell? The instructor of Greece, the nation from whom the great lawgiver of the Israelites received his learning, the wonder of the earth in former ages, stands there with its social state represented before our eyes in paintings which have defied the ravages of time: its dead have furnished us with manuscripts containing their ceremonial ritual, the chronological series of their kings, and many other matters connected with these subjects: their dress, their manufactures, their naval architecture, are all known to us; and the result is the

certainly (if our reading of hieroglyphics can be at all depended on) that even as long as 5000 years ago, Egypt was an old country, and the wild barbarian state "when wild in woods the noble savage ran," appears as remote from that period as from the present. Art, luxury even, the vices of wealth and power, are apparent, but of the so-called state of nature, nothing is to be seen.

Manethon divides his lists of kings into dynasties; the names of the kings of each dynasty, and his length of reign being given, with some few observations by the abridger of his history as to the remarkable events in each reign. It has been conjectured, and perhaps justly, that some of these reigns were wholly or in part contemporary; that some of the dynasties also might be reigning in different parts of Egypt at the same time; but even after striking out enough of these supposed contemporary dynasties to make the list of Manethon agree with that of Eratosthenes, the earliest king of all Egypt must have ascended the throne about B.C. 3643,*

* See Bunsen's "*Ægyptens Stelle in der Weltgeschichte*." As this work is now translated into English, it will be easy for any one to satisfy himself as to the chronology given by that writer, whose views are here adopted to a certain extent.

and the paintings in the tombs at Beni Hassan must date at least B.C. 2800 ; giving them at this time an actual antiquity very little short of 5000 years : for they bear the name of that far famed king of the twelfth dynasty, whose extraordinary stature, extensive conquests, and long reign are recorded by Manethon, and by Herodotus. His name is variously written by the different transcribers : in some it is Sesostris, in others Sesonchosis, and in the monuments, Sesortesen. It was at one of the most brilliant periods of the Egyptian monarchy, therefore, that we have the elaborate representation of social life which these tombs afford : and this brilliant period was apparently anterior by many centuries to the birth even of Abraham.

At this epoch then, the Egyptians were skilled in the art of glass-blowing ; the smelting and working of metals, weaving, pottery, brick making, boat building, rope making, preparing leather, making wine from the grape, writing, painting, sculpture : they had saws for the carpenter, sickles for the reaper, scythes for the cutter of stubble, chisels for the sculptor : their buildings were supported by columns ; they had gardens elaborately laid out, boats covered like a gondola to protect the passengers from the

rays of the sun; the rich enjoyed field sports in their preserves, which were stocked with wild animals by the labour of slaves; ladies had their social meetings, where they were entertained by flute players, and admired or criticised each other's dress; guests came to feasts in chariots drawn by caparisoned horses, and were entertained by tumblers and dancing girls, dressed in transparent robes, for the manufacture of which Egypt was always famous; and games of skill resembling draughts were played. Yet these people, so luxurious in their habits, were coarse and cruel: the feasts end in bestial excess on the part of both sexes; the gentleman who came in his chariot is carried home on the shoulders of his slaves in a state of senseless intoxication, and the lady of rank and fortune is seen in her home giving no less disgusting proof of the foregone intemperance. On the other hand, the slaves employed in the brick fields are urged to their work with the lash, while their rapid and forced movements show that the task master's whip allowed no repose; "the tale of bricks" must be completed; for the scribe is there noting the number.*

* The above details are taken from the elaborate drawings of Champollion and Rosellini, made on the spot.

From the above enumeration of what we are wont to term the arts of civilisation, we might fancy ourselves introduced to the dominions of a Hindu prince of our own times. No! It is the picture of an age of the world when primæval barbarism has been supposed to have prevailed. Trace back the Egyptians from the age of the great Sesortesen towards that of the founder of the sole monarchy, and what do we find? Pyramids, obelisks, gigantic statues, temples; all the evidences of wealth and power. Writing materials are depicted on the monuments of the fourth dynasty; the first pyramids appear to have been tombs built for themselves by the monarchs of the third dynasty; and if we may credit the scanty records preserved to us by the transcribers of Manethon, Menes himself, the first sole monarch, was a great conqueror, and his son Athothis, enriched probably by the spoils of the vanquished, founded and embellished Memphis. The age of barbarism, like the rainbow, recedes as we attempt to follow it, and it may well admit of a doubt whether it ever existed at all* till war had desolated the country, and degraded the conquered race.

* " — as man is not provided with instinct nor with that uniform, unavoidable mental bias, by which, like the

In Egypt, as in Hindostan and several other ancient empires, the people were divided into

animals of the field, he could always secure his best happiness; it is but just and philosophical to conclude that the Creator would grant to man, as soon as he had made him, some substitute for that peculiar skill with which the animals are endued—that is, that God would grant to man the knowledge essential to his happiness in the three relations of mortality, immortality, and capability of perpetual improvement. As a *mortal being*, man required the knowledge of the choice of food. This is not given [to him] by instinct. This knowledge therefore would be the commencement of revelation. As an *immortal being*, he would require hope of the future, the knowledge of the Deity. As an *improving and progressing being*, which our own eyes perceive the human race from generation to generation to be, man would have required, at the very beginning, the knowledge of language, which could not have been invented by any conceivable unaided human powers, and he must have known and begun the practice of labour which is the only true origin of all arts, sciences, refinement, leisure, taste, and other mental felicities. Now precisely such things as our reason might have expected, we have sufficient evidence to believe have been granted to us. As a *being intended to live in this world*, we are either expressly informed or may fairly infer, that God granted to man, by revelation, the knowledge of food; the use of clothing; and the ordinance of marriage, the sacred institution from whence proceed the domestic relationships and the first charms of society. As an *immortal being*, he was impressed by revelation with the knowledge of the

castes;* those of the priests and warriors being placed at the head, with peculiar privileges.† There is so much apparent benefit to be derived from requiring the son to follow the profession of his father at a time when books were rare, and instruction, in consequence, was mostly oral; that we can suppose even a wise legislator wishing to establish this system. It was a mistake, however; for where the danger of competition is removed, the spur to exertion and consequent improvement is also taken away; but almost every evil of the world owes its origin to the pursuit of good by some mistaken path. Egypt had become rich, and great, and wise beyond all its neighbours; what could be better than to pre-

Deity, and the way to serve him. Revelation was essential to his happiness at first, to elevate him from a condition, which, without revelation, would have been ignorance and misery. His continued improvement depended upon retaining a knowledge of it." *Townsend's Ecc. and Civ. Hist. philosophically considered*, vol. i. p. 19.

* Herod. lib. ii. c. 164.

† We find that when Joseph "purchased the land for Pharaoh," and saddled it with a perpetual tax of one fifth of the produce, the lands of the priests were exempted. It would appear from what Herodotus says, touching the exemption from imposts enjoined by the military that these lands too had been spared.

serve it just in that state by stringent laws, which should forbid all change? Even in later times we find the Lacedæmonians captivated by the same notion; and endeavouring to resist the innovating spirit of other states: they only precipitated their own ruin by so doing, yet there must have been something striking in the good order produced by this stagnation of mind, to have won, even in its decadence, the admiration of a statesman like Kimon, and a philosopher like Plato.

In a preserved fragment of Dikearchos, the first institutor of the system of caste is said to have been a first Sesortesen,* who lived 2936 years before the first Olympiad.† In the remains of Manethon he is said to have been the inventor of the art of building with hewn stone, to have made great improvements in the art of

* The name is written Sesonchosis in Dikearchos; Sesosthos, in the list of Manethon as given by G. Syncellus, from Eusebius; Tosorthos, in that given also from Manethon by Julius Africanus. As the second Sesortesen is also called Sesonchosis in the Greek writers, we may justly consider all these names to be but variations, or mistakes of transcribers.

† This is a somewhat earlier date than Bunsen's corrected chronology assigns to that king, who was the second or third of the third dynasty.

engraving inscriptions, and so to have excelled in knowledge of medicine that he was called *Æsculapius*. In him seems to be realized our imagined wise legislator, who sought to ensure the permanence of the improvements he had made, by requiring the son to pursue the profession of his father; and the degree of perfection in the arts exhibited in the paintings and monuments of the kings of some of the following dynasties, shews that at first the plan was not unsuccessful.

In one case however this institution was attended with more serious consequences than the mere stagnation of mechanical art and science which it occasioned. It produced a stagnation of mind also in the great mass of the people; for the priests, now a favoured class, segregated from the rest by their learning and their riches, no less than by their privilege of caste;* despising the ignorance of the lower orders, devised ceremonies to amuse rather than to enlighten them; and thus perpetuated, and even increased this ignorance. All that we are told of the mysteries, the secret doctrines, &c. which

* The priests were also the keepers of the public records.

the Greeks affirm to have been introduced from Egypt, confirms this; the religion of the heart which ought to have expressed itself in the simple prayer or thanksgiving which formed the first worship of man; was exchanged for a set of ceremonies so complicated, that the complete knowledge of them became an art requiring long instruction; the truth was hid under a veil which common eyes were unable to see through; and the sacerdotal caste arrogated consequence to itself for knowing what it had itself originally concealed.

There is a tendency in mankind to keep that a secret which is profitable; and it is seldom that any priesthood existing as a corporate body, has entirely escaped the dangerous influence of the spirit of caste.* We have a notice in Ma-

* It is to this probably that most of the corruptions of Christianity have been owing. Man is unwilling to believe that the approach to his Maker is easy, or his laws simple as nature itself: like Naaman, he despises the short plain order, "wash and be clean"—and seeks for more impressive ceremonies. It is perhaps the very littleness of man in his own estimation which makes him magnify the distance between the Deity and himself, till he dares not attempt to step over it in any ordinary way. Hence the gorgeousness of ceremonial worship.

nethon that the worship of the Apis and Mnevis, and the Goat of Mendes, began at a very early period : probably, if the second and third dynasties were contemporary, about the time of the above mentioned king and lawgiver : but still it would appear to have been a secondary kind of worship ; for in the paintings at Beni-Hassan, though the act of prayer, and the offering of incense is often represented, no figure of the deity to whom this service was dedicated, is given. At a later period both paintings and sculpture abound with representations of strangely misformed deities, which are receiving the homage of their worshippers. Yet in the midst of all this, the books of the priesthood (for such we must imagine the ceremonial ritual of which so many fragments are still existing) tell of a judgment after death, according to the actions performed during life ; of the immortality of the soul ; and of its re-union with the body ; though it does not appear that these doctrines were understood in their pure spiritualism : or if ever they were so, the priests had concealed their knowledge till they had lost it : * for Herodotus

* A case not without a parallel ; for the Brahmins of India are said to calculate eclipses with considerable

informs us that, in his time, they affirmed indeed the immortality of the soul, but asserted that, on quitting the body, it entered into that of some other animal, and after having passed through this course for 3000 years, it returned to its human body again. *

It was for the returning soul then, that its original tenement was so carefully preserved, in order that it might be found entire when the 3000 years had elapsed: it was for this that the mighty made themselves sepulchres so solid and so vast, that their very purpose became a puzzle to after ages, till the inquisitive research of our own time discovered the inscriptions which marked them as tombs of kings. The monarch still clung to his kingdom; the immortality he looked for was earthly, and he cared not how many lives were sacrificed to the raising this monument of his pride, which after 3000 years were past, should deliver up intact the very hand that had swayed the sceptre — the very integuments even, which had been clothed in the kingly robes. Thus it was that the re-

accuracy, though they have wholly lost the knowledge of the principles on which those calculations are founded. See *Bailly Histoire de l'Astronomie*.

* Herod. lib ii. c. 123.

fusal of sepulture to their kings, if judged unworthy, was a real punishment: for with such views of a future existence, the destruction of the body must have been considered nearly as an annihilation of the individual, and we may thus understand the law which allowed the creditor to seize a parent's remains, as a pledge for the payment of a debt.

The religious tenets of a people form so large a part of that inner mental life, whence all actions spring, that the customs of a nation can hardly be separated from their belief; for sooner or later, if this be really a belief, it must model the external on the pattern of the internal man: what we believe to be important we attend to; what we think of no consequence we neglect: and the more careless sepulture of Europe probably springs as much from the belief in a spiritual resurrection, as the embalming of the dead in Egypt did from the grosser notions of the people with regard to the future state of the soul. We may therefore probably find in this passage of Herodotus an explanation of much that seems singular in the habits of the Egyptians; and perhaps even gain from it a key to the very tone of thought of those remote times: and the grossness and cruelty which prevailed under the

sway of the second Sesortesen, will appear to be but the natural result of an unspiritual and sensual system, which never raised men's hopes or wishes beyond material things, and made his best reward a return to this earth, its pleasures and its pomp.

We have no positive knowledge of the state of man in other countries at the early period to which the monuments of Egypt carry us back ; but India, China, and Persia, claim for themselves a civilisation as ancient, and there is no reason why a state of things which we find certainly proved in one country, should not have extended to others. Indeed if we may be allowed to reason from analogy, it is much more probable that other nations should have reached to something near the same point ; than that Egypt should have stood alone. China has been so much a sealed book, hitherto, that we can say little as to its antiquities, or even as to its present habits ; but there is much in modern Hindostan which reminds us of the state of manners depicted in the tombs of the ancient Egyptians. The resemblances in polity, in customs, in manufactures, are too many and too great to have been wholly accidental : and it seems more rational to conclude that they are

the still surviving remains of an ancient system, widely extended, than to suppose them adopted in later times from a country with which there was but little intercourse. A remarkable instance of that sort of resemblance which marks a common origin, may be found in the woven fabrics of the two countries: the inequality in fineness of the warp and the woof; which was the characteristic of the longcloths of India, so familiar to our fathers, is equally apparent in the mummy wrappers; and cloths woven in shawl patterns have been found in ancient mummy cases. The nations of Europe learned the manufacture of muslin and calico from India; yet they did not adopt the peculiarity of texture noticed above, which appeared calculated to injure the durability of the fabric; and it is hardly possible to account for the exact resemblance between the Egyptian and Hindostanee style of weaving, save upon the supposition that the artisans of both countries had learned their art in the same school, and carried it with them into the lands they colonized. The transparent dresses of the women, in the pictures at Beni-Hassan, are evidently muslin; and in those pictures we find the dancing girls, the tumblers, and the jugglers, so well known to such of our

countrymen as have visited the courts of the native princes of Hindostan.

Egypt remained in the same state of semi-civilisation, without advancing or receding, for a period to be reckoned, not by hundreds, but by thousands of years; and but for the Macedonian conquest, which involved it in the restless progress of the Greek system, we might have found it in our days still in the same state; like China, weak, and awaiting only the sword of the conqueror, but subsisting. There is no reason why what was possible in the case of Egypt should not really have occurred with regard to India; and along with the system of caste, which we know to be of the highest antiquity, it may have preserved to this day the customs of the very period when that system first petrified social life.

Within a short time the opinions here advanced, have received a farther corroboration from the disinterment of sculptures from the palaces, or temples of the ancient Assyrian empire; which mark a state of civilisation very similar to that of Egypt. We find there a monarch sumptuously apparelled and attended; horses harnessed to chariots; swords elaborately ornamented on the hilt; dresses em-

broidered and fringed; and a style of sculpture greatly resembling that of ancient Egypt, even to the point of giving a representation of a human figure with the head of a hawk, or eagle, closely resembling that of the hawk-headed Osiris, so common in the hieroglyphics of that country. The very strongly marked muscles of the legs, however, differ very strikingly from the effeminate forms of the Egyptians, and lead us at once to suppose that these sculptures represent a race of mountaineers. The state of art was evidently the same; but not so the artists, or the race from whom they copied.

There is one other nation whose records may be interrogated as to the moral and social state of man at a very early period. The code of law given to the Israelites is undeniably the most ancient record of this kind now existing, and notwithstanding its fragmentary state,* its age and its authenticity give it an extraordinary value to the enquirer into the moral history of man.

* No one can peruse the books of the Pentateuch without seeing that the sudden breaks, repetitions, and occasional discrepancies, mark a work which has suffered from the lapse of time, but of which every known fragment had been carefully preserved, by writers of a later date; who have inserted comments of their own as they went on.

Although, as has been already observed, the polity of the Hebrew tribes must be referred chiefly to the class of stationary systems, yet the legislator of the Israelites appears to have been so far in advance of his times, that, had his law been strictly observed, it probably would have placed the nation in the vaward of the then civilisation. The people were not wholly without a voice in the government, and until they chose to follow the example of other nations, and fancied that they gained dignity by having a king at their head, their system was so far republican that it might easily have effected such amendments and alterations as the times required: in fact such a change was made when a king was elected. It was the alliance with Egypt, which their far sighted leader had deprecated, that threw them back into that system of semi-civilization from which they might have emerged.

The system established by Moses, as far as we are acquainted with it, improved the condition of the slave;* refined or forbade the grossness of the worship bestowed on the personified powers of nature by other nations;† and lessened

* See Exod. xxi. 2-11, 26, 27. Levit. xxv. 35-42. Deut. xxiii. 15, 16

† See Levit. xix. 28, 29. Deut. xxiii. 17, 18.

some of the barbarities of war as practised at that period. But after the death of the first leaders of the migration, the Hebrew tribes appear to have returned more and more to the habits of the Arabians from whom they sprung, and the code of Moses and Joshua was but partially observed. Rude, and cruel even in many instances, as that code appears to us of later times, the very circumstance that it was impossible to maintain it in force after the master minds which had promulgated it were no longer at the head of affairs, shows that the Israelites, like the Athenians, were incapable of receiving a better: yet they had been, as it were, identified with the most civilised nations of the ancient world. Their enslavement, it would appear, began no long time before the birth of Moses: not longer than one generation; and we can scarcely suppose a people to have been completely brutalised in that short space: it is therefore fair to assume that the Israelites differed not much from the middling and lower classes of Egyptians, at the time of the Exodus: and that the prohibitions and injunctions of the Mosaic code would have been equally applicable at that time to most other nations. The short space allowed in these small treatises will not permit

me to enter into many details; those who wish to pursue the subject further, will be able to do so for themselves by a perusal of the books of Hebrew law. It will suffice here to draw a general conclusion as to the state of society up to the time when Greece began that career which was destined to give a new impetus to the world.

We find then that the human race was very early divided into two classes—the nomade and the agricultural: that, as may be gathered from the records of Egypt, war very soon sprung up between the two; the hardy nomade tribes being not unwilling to enjoy the fruits of the agriculturist's labour. It was carried on with extreme ferocity, and the captives were subjected to toils so severe, that few sustained the loss of freedom many years; and this *was usual* for a long period; witness the state of the Helots under the Lacedæmonians, and the treatment of the Athenian army captured by the Syracusans. The Egyptians were proverbial for the harsh treatment of their slaves, and it was only among the Israelites, and the Athenians at a later period, that the law gave any protection to these unfortunate persons. Arts were carried on with considerable skill, but they were manual arts:

the aid of science was very seldom called in, and this was the natural consequence of a widely extended system of slavery: for where human bone and muscle can be used to the utmost extent that the lash can enforce, there is small inducement to study the means of saving labour by machinery. A predatory inroad supplied the demand for human beasts of burden, but the art confided to untaught and unwilling hands was not carried to perfection; and the master was obliged to content himself with a rude splendour, such as the number, rather than the skill of his slaves could produce; and a hot climate being always unfavorable to labour, both of body and mind, the toil which seemed needless while it could be performed by others, however imperfectly, was rarely undertaken. It is probably to the freedom of Europe that it owes its great progress in science: the electric telegraph would not have been invented where relays of slaves could be placed, as formerly in Mexico, to convey a piece of intelligence at a speed, which, if very much inferior to our present means of intercourse, was yet satisfactorily rapid. The nations of antiquity thus paid the penalty of their misdeeds; for by this habit of employing slave labour, and by enslaving the whole population of

captive cities in order to procure it, it not unfrequently happened that a man whose intellect might have enlightened the world, wasted his time in menial toil, and left no trace of the great thoughts which had once occupied his mind. A chance only prevented this from being the fate of Plato! Added to this, books were rare and costly: the disciples and friends of a wise or a good man were the depositories of his thoughts; and if the city they inhabited became the prey of a conqueror, they of course were enslaved as well as their master. Separated from him, and from each other, those thoughts which might have germinated, and borne ripe and good fruit under other circumstances, perished almost as they arose; and the world stood still for ages, both in science and in art.

The restraints put upon private revenge in this code,* and the ameliorations enjoined in the

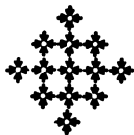
* The writer is not ignorant that some German critics, especially Ewald, have asserted, and brought strong arguments to prove, that the ancient Hebrew books which we now possess, were not the *most* ancient; but rather compilations by a later hand, from papyrus manuscripts fast going to decay, and traditions which were in danger of being forgotten. The references to other books as authorities, the repetitions, the sudden interruptions in the subject matter, as well as the occasional discrepan-

condition of the slave, intimate but too plainly a state of violence and licentiousness, which, happily for us, is a matter of history and conjecture, rather than of experience. Even the especial directions as to personal cleanliness indicate no small degree of brutish indifference to such matters among a people where such injunctions were necessary. Individual rights too, seem to have been but little regarded, even in the great monarchy of Egypt; for the apprehensions of Abraham lest he should be put to death as a preliminary to the seizure of his wife for the king's harem, even if it be but a tradi-

cies, all give strong support to this opinion; which is also corroborated by arguments less within the comprehension of unlearned readers, drawn from differences of style in the original. But be this as it may, no doubt exists that the Mosaic law was given, and there recorded, in whatever age the books may have received their final touches. Even the fragmentary state of the books in question, affords the best warranty for the respect in which those older records were held, whose least remains were so carefully treasured up: and therefore their authority, as to the moral and social state of man in that age of the world, is by no means impaired by being submitted to the test of criticism, which, while it clears away some difficulties by showing that there have been interpolations, establishes on a yet firmer foundation the general truth of the Hebrew scriptures.

tion, varied into two or three different forms;* tell of a lawlessness of oppression in the countries where he sojourned, which justifies the opinions above advanced; i. e. that the provisions of the Mosaic law would have been equally needed among other nations. Violence, licentiousness, ferocity, and the grossest sensual indulgences, seem to have been mixed up with a rude luxury; and this state of things has continued almost unchecked up to the present time among the nations which have retained the stationary system of civilisation.

* Gen. xii. 10 &c. xx. 2. xxvi. 7. These repetitions of the same fact with such slight variations, seem to indicate either that the circumstance was one of almost every day occurrence; or that the tradition in the lapse of time had become multiplied—in either case it is equally good for the purpose for which it is cited.





CHAPTER III.

POLYTHEISM AND IDOLATRY.

THERE is something so absurd and unphilosophic in the supposition that there *can* be a plurality of deities, or that anything fashioned by human hands *can* be Divine, that we have been wont to consider the practice of the ancient world in this respect as a completely unaccountable folly: and most writers, in consequence, have given rather the history than the *rationale* of the mythology current before the coming of Christ. Yet as a whole world does not usually become simultaneously demented, we must suppose that these absurdities had some origin which was not absurd. No man, or set of men, ever embraces evil, *quoad* evil; it is some *ignis fatuus*, which appears to them to be good, that leads them astray; often so far that they are not able to retrace their steps; but they imagined, the while, that they were following a guiding light. The subject is one which deserves deep thought, deeper than has perhaps been generally bestowed on it.

In the absence of all historical record, the origin of the early religious rites of the nations of antiquity must remain to a certain degree a matter of conjecture : but there are some feelings so deeply rooted in our nature, that when we argue from these data, we may proceed with tolerable confidence that we are not far from the truth. Man feels himself small and weak amid the forces of nature : he sees a power in operation which even the wisest cannot combat, and the more ignorant, the more brutalised he is, the more he feels his utter helplessness : but the wise man investigates causes, finds that the greater the force, the less is it visible and tangible ; and therefore soon arrives at the conviction that the great First Cause must be still more remote from the grasp of the senses. The philosopher of all ages, as far as we can trace back with any certainty, has been a pure theist. Such was Zoroaster among the Persians ; such were the great founders of Greek philosophy ; such were the patriarchs described in the Hebrew records. But the ignorant man, unable to follow the steps of the philosopher, but equally sensible of the presence of a superior power, looks only to the force in action, whatever it may be, and holds *that* to be Divine : for, to

the ignorant man, whatever or whoever is stronger and wiser than himself, is an object of veneration. The book of Job, which had its origin, probably, in the remotest times,* gives a noble specimen of the early religious belief of the wise and great among the Arabs: the people, nevertheless, were beginning to seek a more visible god: for the patriarch is made by the writer to defend himself from the charge of having been "enticed by the sun when he shineth, or the moon walking in brightness." A few ages later saw them gross idolaters.

Zoroaster, when he preached the unity and spirituality of the Deity,† professed only to *re-*

* Great differences of opinion have existed as to the antiquity of the book of Job; but its internal evidence fixes its age at a very early period—long before the Exodus, it would seem: for there is no mention of any of the gross idolatries constantly practised in those countries after that period. The only allusion to any false worship is to that of the heavenly bodies. c. xxxi. 26, 27. It might, however, have existed long as a traditional poem among the Arabs before it found a translator, or was committed to writing at all.

† The labours of Hyde, Beausobre, and others, have made the world tolerably well acquainted with the religious and philosophical doctrines of Zoroaster, as far as they can now be gathered from rather contradictory sources. It would appear that he taught the existence of a Supreme Being, or Mithra, who was the author of

store the belief of the ancient Magi :* the most undoubtedly ancient of the fragments of the Orphic hymns speak in strong language of the unity and omnipotence of the Deity, yet the terms which the writer uses to show the completeness of creative power, taken literally, and by persons less spiritualised, might easily have been made the groundwork of Polytheism.

two principles, named by the Persians Oromasdes and Ahrimaues, or, in other words, light and darkness, or the good and evil principle. Some have been of opinion that Zoroaster taught the existence of these two principles only : it matters not much, for if a dispassionate view be taken of the question, it resolves itself into this :—that GOOD, expressed by LIGHT, is eternal ; and that, coexistent with that good, must be a possible privation of it, which is EVIL, or DARKNESS : GOD, or the self-existing good, or light, cannot be deprived of himself ; but if we suppose any material creation which is not identical with God, then the possible privation of light, or good, begins. This existed *in posse*, if not *in esse*, from the time that there was good ; which is a truth not to be contradicted, for creation was possible to God at any time. How far in the expression of this metaphysical truth the advancers of it may have personified the abstract good, and the absence of it, into a substantial individual good and evil power, it is not easy now to say. Probably the vulgar concerned themselves but little with the metaphysical part of this belief, and gave their homage to the sun as the visible source of light and good.

* See Brucker, Hist. Crit. Phil. lib. ii. c. 3.

Nevertheless the system had its origin long before Orpheus, even if he were the introducer of it in Greece ; for if we may credit the monumental chronology of Egypt, that country must have made use of varied *representations* at least of the Deity, at a period long anterior to that usually ascribed to Orpheus : since the figures of different divinities enter into the hieroglyphic writing, to form the names of the king under whose reign or in whose honour these monuments were erected ; nay, in some cases, the figure of a more ancient time seems to have been erased by some later sculptor, and a newer one substituted ;* and even this change took place at a very remote period. We cannot prove more than that such things are, but we may perhaps draw from these apparent contradictions some argument as to the real state of things at the time.

We find almost all through antiquity that each nation—often each town—had its peculiar tutelary deity ; and this deity, excepting in the case of the Israelites and the Persians, was represented under some form either human or monstrous, with various symbolical attributes,

* See Bunsen's *Egyptens Stelle*, &c. vol. i. p. 439.

and was known by a name different from those employed by other nations or districts: the image was honoured in temples, and the deity invoked by the peculiar name, and with rites differing from those of other regions. This is almost all we know of the Polytheism and idolatry of ancient times; and when the obscenity and cruelty of many of those rites are taken into consideration, we shudder, and wonder how men could have formed to themselves such notions of the Deity. Nevertheless there are some circumstances which may lead us to doubt whether this monstrous system was, at its outset, at all the same thing that ignorance in the one class, and indifference on the part of the other, left it at its close.

It has already been stated, that the earliest religion appears to have been a pure and sublime theism,* but a name must be given to the deity who is to be invoked, and we find Moses at once anticipating the question of "What is his name" when about to address his people as the messenger of their God. The title given was one which implied self-existence; another

* Such at least it appears in the earliest written records we possess, and in the traditions of the Persians.

people might look at some other attribute of Divine perfection, and call their Deity by a name implying infinite power: another distinguish him by his creative energy; another by his justice; another by his love; and when the people called on their priests, or their leaders, to give them a visible image to typify the Deity thus named, it would be natural to give it the symbol of the attribute which had been the chief object of attention in the rites instituted in his honour. Hence many of the monstrous figures which we wonder at. The hundred armed idols of the Hindoo worship represent, coarsely, it is true, but intelligibly, the attribute of power: the hawk-headed deities of Egypt imply the far-seeing eye of omniscience. It would be painful to go through the whole; for some of the symbols, though still intelligible representations of other attributes, are gross to obscenity: yet when once the priestly functions were conferred on a separate body of men possessed of more erudition than the common people, and therefore inclined to despise them, it was natural, perhaps, to endeavour to retain in those rude minds some notions of religion, by setting before them symbols which, as their teachers considered the matter, were more fitted to their gross apprehen-

sion than the finer speculations which they reserved for themselves. This is not altogether a conjectural assumption: the names given to some of the deities of Egypt, which, it may be observed, were honoured in particular districts only,* have generally some meaning which accords with far purer notions of the Divinity than the figure implies. The god of the Thebais has the horned head of a ram;—the name signifies “Spirit.” Phthah, the deity to whom the great temple of Memphis was dedicated, is styled “The Lord of Truth;” and the goddess of truth is represented standing before him as his daughter.† Neith, from which title the Greeks are thought to have derived their Athena, according to Plutarch, signifies “I come of myself.”‡ The inscription beside this goddess at Sais, is well known. || Ammon, the god of Thebes is styled “The hidden god;” at

* Herodotus assures us that none of their deities excepting Osiris were honoured over *all* Egypt.

† Wilkinson.

‡ ἦλθον ἀπ’ ἐμαυτης.

|| Ἐγὼ εἰμι πᾶν τὸ γεγονὸς, καὶ ὄν, καὶ ἐσόμενον· καὶ τὸν ἐμὸν πέπλον οὐδεὶς πω θνητὸς ἀνεκάλυψεν. I am everything that was, and is, and shall be; and my covering, or robe, has never yet been raised by any mortal. Plut. de Isid. et Osir. p. 354.

least Plutarch records this to be the meaning of the word, according to Manethon. *

The still existing fetiche worship of the savage tribes of Africa, may perhaps explain the more extraordinary, and apparently absurd worship paid by the ancient Egyptians to their Apis and Mnevis, † to the goat, the ibis, the crocodile, the cat, the onion, and a hundred other objects of this kind. The African of our day does not consider his fetiche, which may be a stone or a tree, as divine by nature, for then all stones and trees would be so; but he requires something visible and tangible to represent to him the invisible power which he acknowledges and fears; and he fixes on something which shall be to him that representative. It is the spiritual power which he thus honours, and would dread the more if he did not thus seem to himself to circumscribe and confine its manifestation to certain spots. When the Israelites called for a tangible object of worship, it was not a *new* deity that they set up—"These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." The golden Apis, as we

* Plut. de Isid. et Osir. p. 354.

† Peculiarly marked bulls so called.

may suppose it to have been, was only what they had been accustomed to see as the representative of the divinity; and even Aaron seemed to think that he could find no better emblem of the invisible JEHOVAH, who had delivered them from bondage, than the fetiche bull of the mighty Egyptians. Probably, therefore, those of the ancients are wrong, who supposed that the Egyptians bestowed worship on these things because they were *useful*: the worship was paid to the power which they were consecrated to, *the spirit* of the fetiche: for this is the account given of it by the people themselves, to those who have been able to converse with them.

The most intelligent in all countries look beyond the Visible, to the Invisible; but the commonalty generally stop short at the Visible; which makes it dangerous to allow any sort of homage to tangible objects: it first corrupted the patriarchal, it has since done the same with the Christian worship. The ignorant peasant adores the miraculous image of some certain shrine, before which he bows to obtain relief or cure; although the more enlightened smile at his simplicity, and profess to see in it nothing more than a reminding symbol of divine providence.

I would therefore in this, as in other things, explain the less known antiquity by the more known practice of modern times: the crucifix of this place or the other; the image of this or that saint, receives positively idolatrous homage from the vulgar and ignorant; but the priest who permits this homage, and perhaps views it with satisfaction, does not in his inward heart either tender it, or believe it good, *per se*; but satisfies himself by the thought that the end justifies the means. *He* professes to worship the One God of heaven and earth, and he himself does so worship; *he* considers the saints whom he honours but as the ministers of God, the crucifix but as the representation of the sufferings of Christ; and *he* has education enough perhaps, to distinguish the invisible reality from the visible symbol. The Egyptian priest of old did but travel the path which those of modern Rome have trod in later times; both, in the first instance, innocently, though misjudgingly: both, as ages rolled on, yielded to the current of popular superstition, and, by degrees, became infected by it themselves, or countenanced it as a profitable error;*

* The speech of a modern Romish priest, an Italian, a few years back—that “Purgatory is the fire that makes our pot boil”—was doubtless that of a mocking spirit,

but neither of them, probably, at the first introduction of an object upon which the eyes and attention of the people might be fixed, either intended or foresaw all that at last resulted from it.

While the settled agricultural nations slid into polytheism by maintaining their own especial view of the divine attributes, and into idolatry by means of the symbolical representations placed before them by the sacerdotal caste; the nomade tribes appear for a long time to have maintained a more spiritualized faith. According to traditions preserved by Diogenes Laertius, who, though not a very critical reporter, is to a certain degree valuable, as having had it in his power to consult books now lost: the Persian* philosophy, or, in other words, the faith of the more enlightened, was more ancient than the Egyptian, and is said by an author whom he

and must not be taken as the sentiment of all: but it shows, at least, the sort of influence which these religious deceptions are likely to have on the minds of the deceivers; an influence more hurtful even than the superstitions they countenance.

* The Persians may be reckoned at the head of the nomade tribes: they were a rude simple people up to very nearly the time of Cyrus.

quotes, to have been derived from that of the Gymnosophists of India; * which perhaps proves little more than that the faith taught by the Magi was reputed to be the most ancient of any known to those writers. This faith, which Zoroaster is said to have reformed in later times, and restored to its original purity; forbade idolatry, and shrunk from the fetiche, or nature worship, which multiplied deities ad infinitum: it allowed, however, what might be considered a kind of dualism; by asserting the coexistence of two eternal principles, the one of good, the other of evil. How this apparent dualism might be reconciled by metaphysical argument with the belief in one only Deity, has already been seen: but it is not likely that many minds were capable of that kind of abstract reasoning; and we see, from what we read of the Persian doctrine, that they were not exempt, any more than others, from a disposition to individualize mere abstract ideas. The evil was in constant warfare with the good principle, hence the evils seen in the world; but as there is something repugnant to reason and feeling in supposing it possible that evil should vanquish good, the Magi seem to

* Diog. Laert. Proem.

have taught that it was inert matter which was coexistent with the good principle ; but that this, when called into action by creative power, developed evil ; and that thus though the evil existed in possibility, even whilst matter was quiescent, it did not wake to life until the universe was formed, and was thus at once eternal and subordinate ; independent in action, yet dependent for its developement on the movement given to material substance. The sun, the heavenly bodies, and fire, as being sources of light, were honoured as typical of the good principle, and, among the vulgar, worshipped ; as appears from the book of Job, already referred to. Satan, who is introduced among the dramatis personæ at the opening of that ancient poem, is evidently the evil principle of the ancient Magi ; 'subordinate to, but nevertheless in warfare with the good Deity, and the inflicter of suffering on mankind.*

* There is so much in this that resembles the faith of the ancient Hebrews, that some ancient writers are said (Diog. Laert. Proem.) to have thought the Magi to have derived their doctrine from that nation : and we may probably find, in this similarity of religious faith, the cause of the favour shown to the Jews by the Persian conquerors of Babylon. The Jews in their turn seem

This notion of the evil inherent in matter, extended widely in the ancient world among the more enlightened ; and seems to have been held, as it is still in Hindostan, by the same persons who were setting the grossest symbols before the people without the least scruple. Cultivated sense and feeling revolted from the coarseness of untaught human nature, and it was perhaps natural to run into the contrary extreme of hating and despising that material nature which seemed necessarily corrupt. Hence we find that the maceration of the body formed a part of philosophic or religious life among most of the ancient nations. The priests of Baal in the time of Elijah gashed themselves with knives to propitiate their deity : in Hindostan to this day the torturing of the body is held an acceptable service : the sage is to be above all earthly pleasures, and to lose his individual existence in the contemplation of the Deity. Yet even out of this creed arose a strange profligacy ; for those who held that the soul was but the prisoner of the body, considered the doings of this

to have adopted from the Persians much of their later belief as to the active agency of evil spirits in tormenting the human frame.

last as wholly inconsequential, and unworthy the attention of the spiritual being incarcerated within. Such at least appears to have been the doctrine of the Gnostics in the first ages of Christianity, who took their opinions from the oriental philosophy; which is not likely to have undergone more change in the lapse of ages than their institutions had done.

The summing up of the state of the world during the first chiliads of its existence appears then to be,—politically; among the agricultural nations a despotism, accompanied by settled laws of property, or what may be called a civil code; among the nomade tribes, an aristocracy, if we may so term the almost independent rule of a chieftain over his dependents, where no monarch was acknowledged; and where the connection between tribes was rather that of alliance and friendship,* than of any acknow-

* As in the case of Abraham, where the neighbouring chiefs, Eshcol and Mamre, were in confederation with him, and assisted in recovering his nephew Lot, his family, and herds, from the hands of the invading force.

ledged nationality : for there does not appear at that time to have been any regular system of law amongst them, which, by its peculiarities, could tend to isolate them from any other people. Among them the decision of the elders of the community was generally complied with, more out of respect, as it would seem,† than as any acknowledged right : but such decisions generally sufficed for that simple mode of life. Slavery seems to have been general ; but in the wandering nomade habits, the distinction of the freeman and the slave could not be severely felt ; the occupations of both were nearly the same ; and we find Abraham's steward, a man born in his house, the son of a slave therefore, both high in his confidence, and likely to have been the heir of his property had he died without issue. Among the established agricultural monarchies, on the contrary, the condition of the slave was much harder. Severe task-work was required from the Israelites in Egypt, and they were beaten if it was neglected ; and exactly the same scene is depicted in the tomb chambers at Beni-Hassan many ages earlier. The people were taxed and oppressed, if we may believe some

* See Job xxix.

traditionary notices remaining to us, in order to raise the immense monuments of Egypt, and to supply the luxuries of the monarch, whose regal state was so great, haughty we might call it, that his sons marched on foot beside him as the bearers of a canopy destined to shelter him from the sun's rays. The system of caste fixed the government as well religious as political, in the hands of certain families: the *people* generally, that is those who were doomed by their birth to handicrafts or menial offices, had no voice in the state, and consequently no remedy against oppression. The sacerdotal caste depending mainly for its supremacy on public opinion, naturally endeavoured to make religious services complicated, in order that none might invade their peculiar province; and bridled even improvement, lest it should curtail their authority.

In religion the agricultura. nations seem to have been the first to fall into absolute idolatry; and this in consequence of the wish of every settled tribe to have its own religious rites, and peculiar temple; in which the Deity should be honoured under the point of view which most especially struck their imagination: the idol, as in the case of Aaron, was a compliance on the part of the priesthood with the grosser appre-

hension of the people. Generally among the agricultural nations, the attribute of the Deity first and most widely honoured, was the creative energy; and the very earliest symbols of this, as well in Egypt as in India, are of the most revolting kind: a proof of the grossness of the people, no less than of the unspiritual nature of their worship. The immortality of the soul in their opinion, and this we find as well in India as in ancient Egypt, consisted in a mere cycle of changes; which, according to the Egyptian notion, brought the spirit back again at last to its original body. Among the nomade tribes a rude, but nevertheless a more spiritualized worship prevailed: the homage to the Supreme Being was paid *sub dio*, under the shade of a grove, perhaps, but no temple sheltered the disgusting figures of a symbolic worship. An altar built by piling a few stones together; a fire kindled upon it, and a sacrifice laid on the fire for the burnt offering, formed the first simple rites. In the migrations of the patriarchs recorded in Genesis, we find as the record of a prolonged sojourn in any part "and he builded there an altar unto the Lord." Fire appears among them to have been held the especial symbol of the Deity; and this, being the most immaterial of

all visible appearances, it seems to have preserved a certain degree of spiritualism in the worship of these tribes. The doctrine of a good and evil principle, the one at variance with the other, seems to have had its rise among the nomade tribes, and to have been chiefly prevalent among them: we find it in the Book of Job among the Arabs, in the traditions of Persia among the earliest Magi, in the writings of the rabbins among the Jews.





CHAPTER IV.

PROGRESSIVE SYSTEMS.

IT was somewhere about the time that the Beni Israel went down into Egypt, that a migratory tribe passed over from the coasts of Asia into the islands and coasts of Greece. Like the Teutones of Europe in later times,—and *they* also claim an Asiatic origin,—they seem to have been accustomed to submit to a king, or rather general, in time of war, who should lead them to battle; but at other times to have claimed and exercised a considerable degree of independence.

The first migratory tribes,—Pelasgi, as they have been generally called,—in their turn yielded to others whose origin is as little known; but from these, at any rate, the country derived the general appellation of Hellas, and the division of its inhabitants into two principal races, the Ionian and the Dorian. The rudeness of these wandering tribes appears to have been in some

degree softened by colonies from the more civilized people of Egypt and Phœnicia ; for, if we may credit tradition, both Attica and Argos received Egyptian princes, and Bœotia was colonized by Phœnicians. In the two former a monarchy was introduced, which at first appears to have been, as in Egypt, a pure despotism, to which the people submitted, probably, in consideration of the comfort they derived from a regular government, as compared with the lawlessness of a barbarian tribe, unrestrained by rule of any kind : but the independent spirit of the people appears not long to have brooked control : the elders or magnates of each tribe probably had been accustomed to hold the sway as far as any was acknowledged, (as we see still to be the case among the wandering Turko-mans, and the other wild tribes of Asia,) and entire submission to one ruler was foreign to their habits and their tastes. We have no account remaining of how the first struggle arose ; but all through Greece we find in the earliest records the account of a contention for power between the monarch and the nobility, the *eupatridai*, as they are called, persons, that is, of ancient family who probably at that time could trace their descent from the heads of their

tribes respectively, before the time that a monarch had been acknowledged among them. Step by step the kingly office was curbed in its power, then made elective, then abolished in Athens, and so restricted in other states, that the king was but a magistrate charged with the execution of certain duties. The great families first, and then the people, generally, claimed the making of the laws under which they were to live; and as a whole nation could not be assembled on all occasions, a certain number were chosen to act as a deliberative assembly, and propose the laws which upon consideration seemed good, for the sanction of the mass of the people. For the first time since governments had been established, here was a provision for change without revolution or bloodshed; and the first representative government the world ever saw, signalized its birth by so stupendous an exertion of the energies of a freed people, that the giant force of Persia, before which the mighty empire of Egypt had sunk like a house of sand, rolled back defeated and disgraced from the shores of Greece.

The Ionian race, gay, enterprising, and active, seemed formed for progress; they had no reminiscences of long enjoyed power: beside the

Egyptians, Assyrians, or Hindùs, they were but a people of yesterday ; their forefathers of a few centuries back were wild tribes, unversed in the arts of civilized life ; illiterate, and even in that art which the savage learns the most readily, that of war, not advanced beyond the rudest weapons. Their national hero, Hercules, had not reached so far even, as to fashion a lance : a massive club, and a quiver of arrows, were his only arms ; his only defence, the skin of a wild beast. His recorded feats are those of a lawless savage ; so much so, that the poets of a later age amused themselves and their auditory, by representing his rude simplicity, and coarse manners. A Greek beside an Egyptian, therefore, had nothing to boast of ; he had no past, but the future was his. Nature had given him a lively, versatile wit, and, without much stretch of imagination, we may figure to ourselves other travellers earlier than Herodotus, received with the same haughty boasts of ancient learning, weighing the sum of all that Egypt could teach, and asking themselves if there were not more yet to be learnt and taught. Whilst the Egyptian was dwelling on what he *had done*, we may fancy the lively Ionian measuring with no sparing hand what he himself *could*, and therefore *would*

do, and apostrophizing the slave of custom and ceremony with—"Stand still there, and I will soon reach, and then pass you." Such an one was THALES, such an one was PYTHAGORAS. Both sought in Egypt for what was already known, but instead of listening as humble disciples, this was to them but the stepping stone; for they had learned to love knowledge before they went to Egypt to seek for it.

We might consider this as something peculiar in the idiosyncrasy of the Greeks, had we not the same results produced by the same causes, nearer our own times. The migratory hordes of Asia which found their way into Germany, differed little, if at all, from those which peopled Greece. The Nibelungen Lied, and the Heldenbuch, furnish us with parallels to the feats of Hercules, and the early heroes of Greece: dragons and monsters subdued, multitudes mastered by a single arm, form the staple of the Teutonic songs: in these songs too, we find the same system of manners; it might be added, the same licentiousness; and Theseus or Achilles might be changed into Dietrich or Siegfried, and vice versâ,* on many occasions,

* Dietrich sojourns at the court of king Walgund in female apparel, as Achilles is said to have done at that

without much damage to the tale. Warlike feats were the road to distinction, and quiet submission to law was a thing little dreamed of among these giant and dragon killers.

It was from the heroes of Teutonic song, nevertheless, that the system of law, which the world has pronounced to be the best, by imitating it, originally emanated. It was from the unwillingness to submit to kingly power, arising out of the hardy habits of the wild rover, that parliaments arose: from a like jealousy of regal interference, sprang the trial by a jury, composed of the peers of the accused; and from this independence of spirit, cherished by institutions in conformity with it, sprang also all the improvements in science and philosophy which minds accustomed to exercise themselves on all subjects, unshackled by system, have now introduced. Europe has cause to bless the outbreak of the northern tribes, fearful as it was at the time; and not a less blessing to the world were the wild barbarians of the mountains of Attica; who, scorning control, whether physical

of Lycomedes, and with a like result. Siegfried anoints himself with the fat of a dragon, and becomes invulnerable, excepting in one spot, where a leaf had stuck to his shoulder during the operation.

or mental, in a few centuries traversed the ground on which the agricultural empires had slumbered for as many chiliads.

It seems a law of human nature that restraint on one point deadens the mental power in all. Once mark a spot, and say to the spirit of enquiry, "This is ground which shall not be approached," and the mind chafes round the barrier, and if it cannot surmount it, falls into a sort of spiteful inactivity, which becomes at last a habit of the people: for, though the father might fret at his chain, the son wears it more easily; and if forbidden the exercise of the higher functions of the mind, learns to content himself with the animal enjoyments of the body. When once degraded to this point, recovery seems hopeless, until an infusion of new blood, and with it, new habits, gives a fresh impulse to the nation.

When the hardy wanderers of Asia took possession of the mountains of Greece, Egypt was fast approaching this point. After a short blaze of renewed greatness under the Remeses', science and art seem first to have become stationary, and then to have retrograded; and if it be true that Thales, in his visit to that country, taught them how to measure the height of their own

pyramids, great must have been the decline, if their science had ever merited the name it had acquired. In the time of Plato the stationary system had arrived at its height;* but, with a singular perverseness on the part of the pupil and admirer of the greatest innovator of his time, he lauds the good order thus produced; and, in his "Laws," expresses his opinion that it would be well to imitate it in other states: an extraordinary instance of timidity of mind in so bold a thinker.

"It is dangerous," he observes, "to allow children to change their modes of amusement;

* "It seems to have been a long time ago that the Egyptians recognised the truth of what we have been saying, that in every state the youth should be conversant with nothing but what was the most excellent in figure and melody. Having, therefore, fixed on some good models, they exhibited them in the temples; and it was forbidden to painters, or other artists, to innovate, or vary in any way, from the models thus regulated by the laws of their country. This prohibition still exists as well in music as in painting and sculpture; and if we examine we shall find among them works executed 10,000 years ago (I do not speak at random, but mean literally what I say) that are neither better nor worse than those now executed." Plato, *Leg. lib. ii.* p. 657. The songs and music which they use, he goes on to say, are attributed to Isis.

for if they are accustomed to divert themselves always in the same way, there is no fear that they will attempt any innovation in the laws; but if they are allowed to seek variety in amusement, in dress, and other things of a like nature, a youth so educated will be prepared to despise ancient manners, and care for nothing but what is new."* Indeed scarcely any of the ancient legislators seem to have been in the least degree aware that in the body politic, as in the body natural, change is essential to life: all endeavoured to perpetuate the laws which they naturally enough thought the best. Solon is an exception, for he both acknowledged that his system was an imperfect one, and with a wise foresight, provided the means for remedying the evils incidental to all human legislation as time passes on, and circumstances change. Yet even after this provision had been made, its abuses so disgusted the thinking part of the community, that but for the character of the people, too long bred in independence to brook a crushing system of laws, the great impulse given to the world by Athenian civilisation had been lost.

* Plat. Leg. lib. vii.

The wealth of the great agricultural empires of antiquity led, as we have seen, to luxury, and all its concomitant vices. Whatever were the habits of the meaner sort, the rich, at any rate, were intemperate and licentious, and although later writers have questioned whether polygamy was general, there seems little doubt from the slight notice we have of the Egyptian court, in the book of Genesis, that a harem formed a part of the monarch's luxuries. Where such a practice is tolerated, it changes the whole face of society; for females are then educated for a master's pleasure, rather than to be the wise and honoured friend, wife, or mother; and the paintings of Egypt show us but too plainly the degrading effects of the system.

The poverty of the roving tribes which we are now considering, preserved them in great measure from this evil: among them, indeed, woman was frequently but a labouring slave; but no toil, however severe, is half so degrading to the character as the system of concubinage. Without any strict notions of morality, therefore, the peoples of Greece, as well as of Germany, did not practice polygamy at all usually; *

* It is said that after the plague at Athens it was

and though the chances of war placed female captives at the mercy of their conquerors, it was still a hated license, and by no means the acknowledged destiny of woman. Thus the state of society, among the Greeks of the earliest times, was rude, and rough and coarse, but not demoralized through luxury. Homer's heroes stand nearly on a par with the North American warrior, ere his intercourse with the white trader had made him a despised drunkard. The expedition of Ulysses and Diomed into the Trojan camp has very much the character of a scalping party; and the praise with which it is recorded shows the character of the people who would consider as a hero the planner and executor of such a piece of wanton butchery. Those to whom these lays were sung must themselves have been such as their heroes are represented to have been, or these poems never would have become popular: and we may well conclude from the freedom with which the right of the victor was exercised over his female captives, of whatever rank, that the simpler manners of the earlier

recommended to the citizens to take two wives in order to the more rapid re peopling of the city: but this very recommendation is a proof that it was not the practice of the country.

Greeks, were as I have stated above, rather the result of poverty than of principle. As, however, it is necessary to progress that woman should advance, so the poverty which saved that sex in general from the last step in degradation, was one of the working causes of the progressive system of civilisation which first arose in that country.

We might trace the parallel yet farther in the advance of the Doric and Teutonic tribes, but that among the latter another element is found which greatly changed the state of things. The Teutonic tribes received Christianity, and however it might be modified among the rude people who professed it, still there is a purity and self devotion inculcated by that most lovely of all systems, which none of the *nations* of antiquity, (I do not speak now of individuals) ever attained to. It was with a superstitious awe no doubt that the barbarian bowed before the cross, but he did bow; the very corruption of Christianity, the worship of the Virgin, had an influence very different from, and far more salutary than that of the female deities of Egypt and Greece. In ancient times woman was but the female propagator of the species, and all the graces of character and conduct were sacrificed to

that one object ; hence the general coarseness of social life. Christianity held up a different object—it was no longer the earth only which was to be peopled : beings capable of immortality were born into a state of probation from which they were to be removed to enjoy a purely spiritual felicity ; and the parent who fitted his children for immortality, had the feeling of having fulfilled his duty without looking to posterity. *His* name needed not to be remembered on earth who had filled the courts of heaven. Thus, however we may blame the excessive praise given to a life of celibacy ; it was nevertheless the beginning of higher and holier views ; the first step towards that refinement of manners which sets intellectual above physical strength, and places the sexes on that footing of equality which can alone render both thoroughly available to the benefit of society. Those rude nations had perhaps never altered their wild habits so far, but for the homage paid by them at the shrine of the Virgin Queen of Heaven.

Thus the Greek proceeded in his career at disadvantage : the rude worship of the nomade tribe, paid before the stone set up for a memorial, or under the tree whose very shade was such a blessing in those climates that it seemed

most fitted for a place of thanksgiving to the unseen Creator, gave way before the introduced deities of Egypt; and these deities, however the secret of their unity might be known to the sacerdotal caste in that country, assumed a separate and substantive existence when imported into Greece. Neith, the deity of Sais, which seems in that city to have represented self-existence and creative power, became the Athena* of Attica, and the mythological songs of the bards gave a thousand wild histories of the birth and doings of the goddess, who at last retained no more of her pristine attributes than that of wisdom. The unknown deity, worshipped at Dodona, had merged in a Zeus whose birth-place and parentage were known; and the oracle of Ammon—"the hidden God," was thought to be his also. Not that the monstrous fables of the wandering bards, who sang to please the people, found currency among the higher sort; the terms used by the tragedians in speaking of these popular deities sufficiently show the sort

* The Greeks in their time were as great distorters of names as the French and Italians of modern days. The Egyptian words displeased their ears and accordingly syllables were added or changed *euphoniæ gratiâ* till sometimes it is difficult to recognize the original.

of estimation they were held in, but, by degrees, sacrifices and processions grew out of these fables; the people were fed and amused; and thus that very mythology which often excited the laughter even of the meaner sort, became a useful adjunct to the government. Herodotus assures us that these tales had their rise at no very remote antiquity; some time after the despotism of Athens had become a limited monarchy; at a period then, when it was the interest of rulers to find means of amusing the restless populace, so as to prevent them from aiding in, or seeking farther changes: and it needs no great stretch of imagination to suppose the sacrifices of those times to have had the same object as that which Xenophon avows; i. e. that of giving food to the people, and thus keeping them quiet.

The ceremonies thus introduced, many of them derived from Egypt, where the manners of the people were licentious, were fatal to the simple virtues of the wild tribes, who, in their wanderings, had confined themselves to the plain acts of homage which such a life would permit. The Dionysia became scenes of the grossest licentiousness; and the temple which Solon consecrated to Venus Pandemos, shows

how widely the moral taint had spread, even in his time. The triumph over Persia gave the only element wanting to complete the dissolution of manners, i. e. riches ; and thenceforward Athens was the seat not only of learning, but of vice of no ordinary kind. Corinth alone, whose commerce afforded even yet more wealth, seems to have outrun it in corruption.

But the triumph over Persia had other consequences also which were yet more important : it was essentially a *popular* triumph. The people had fought for their liberties, and having resisted the yoke of the stranger, would not submit themselves to domestic oppression — they claimed and obtained political rights : and thus another step was made towards the acknowledgment of the rights of the human race as intellectual beings. But political privileges require both honesty and skill to use them wisely ; and they are usually conceded so grudgingly by the rulers, that the people who are to exercise them have rarely undergone the requisite preparatory training. These privileges have generally been extorted by force, rather than given when the right time had arrived ; and thus it was that the Athenians became rulers over others ere they knew how to rule themselves. One master

mind among them, risen from the people himself, and therefore knowing their deficiencies, saw the danger, and strove to avert it. SOCRATES would have instructed and reformed his fellow citizens; but the current was too strong to be stemmed by the unassisted force of a single man; his principles, if received, would have put a stop to many sources of profit which the unscrupulous had availed themselves of, and his life was the forfeit of his honesty. Athens ran a wild career of mingled greatness and folly, and finally sank; not however without leaving a bright trace of its course which will never be effaced from the mental history of the human race. The bold writers of that free state have not shrunk from propounding all those problems in science and morals most interesting to man, and whatever we may think of their skill in solving them, we must at least acknowledge that they first pointed the way to true greatness; and that, but for the restless spirit of enquiry which was awakened by Greek literature, Europe might still have been slumbering in contented ignorance.



CHAPTER V.

THE HEBREW NATION.

THE reverence with which the early records of this nation have usually been regarded would render it almost necessary to consider its history separately, even if this had not had in itself much that requires careful attention : for the very reverence bestowed on it, has tended to generate some false notions, by preventing writers on these books from taking those comprehensive views of the state of man generally at that period, which are requisite to the full understanding of the books on which they are commenting. It is a truth nevertheless which every day's experience confirms, that neighbouring nations exercise a powerful influence over each other, and although the law of the Hebrews had in it some peculiarities, they were not enough necessarily to isolate the people, as is generally supposed. On the contrary, the customs of the Hebrews, many of them closely re-

sembled those of the Arab tribes, from which great stock they sprung; and even in the present day we see much amongst these last which we read of in the early history of the Hebrews. Hence the readiness with which they mingled together.

I have already noticed that the institutions of Moses, and his immediate successors had much in them calculated to refine and civilise the semi-barbarous people for whose use they were intended: but these institutions fell into desuetude after the death of the last of the conquerors of Canaan,* and the nation appears to have descended again to the level of the surrounding nations. For how long a period this state of lawlessness lasted when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes"—we have no means of ascertaining, for the chronology is not accurately given in the fragments of history which have reached us in the book of Judges: probably it was about 400 years. The state of the country during the time which elapsed between the first settlement, and the election of a king seems to have resembled that of Arabia at no very distant period: powerful tribes owning

Josh. xxiv. 31.

to a certain degree the affinity of a common origin, occupied the land under the rule of their respective chiefs : sometimes leaguings together for their common defence against an invading force, as under Barak, when two tribes defeated the forces of Jabin, king of Hazor ;* or under Gideon, who brought four tribes into the field against the Midianites :† sometimes at bloody feud with each other, ‡ when no foreign enemy bound them together by the tie of a common danger.

The state of manners was such as might be expected from what we know of the general state of the world at that period. Licentiousness and cruelty are the usual vices of untaught man, and the Mosaic institutions were too far disregarded to have any influence in humanising the people. The tabernacle, though its service was still kept up by the family of Aaron, seems to have been little regarded by the distant tribes, who made to themselves some substitute to spare the trouble of going so far to pay their worship ; and even if in heart they still acknowledged the One Creator as the Lord of all, they, like other nations of their time chose to have their own

* Judges iv. 10. † 1b. vi. 35. ‡ 1b. xii. 4.

peculiar representation of His presence. Thus Gideon made an ephod, probably in imitation of that worn by the high priest, and set it up in his own city; and to this the neighbouring tribes resorted as their place of worship. Such also probably was the ephod, &c. made by Micah in Mount Ephraim,* where a Levite served in his "house of Gods:" for "the molten and graven image" were made from a sum set apart by his mother especially for a holy purpose, to be dedicated "*to the Lord*:" and these were afterwards set up by the Danites, when they fixed themselves in Laish, not at all as a serving of other Gods, but as a consecration of their own conquest to the God of Israel: for both Micah and the Danites seem to have set no small value on the services of the Levite whom they had bribed into complying with their wishes. We have here therefore only a further exemplification of what I have already assumed to be the origin of idolatry and polytheism; for here are men professing full allegiance to the Lord Jehovah who yet could not be satisfied without having their own representation of him among them, and their own priest to do him service.

* Judges xvii.

To a people so rude as the Hebrew tribes at that time, the universality of Divine power and presence, is a thing beyond comprehension ; and none were quite at ease without possessing some visible symbol of the Great Deliverer of their people : for that was the character in which the Deity was always regarded by them. This they did not consider as a failure in their duty : it was only when they served the gods of other nations that they considered themselves as traitors to their Divine King, and amenable to punishment in consequence. And this may explain why idolatry became so besetting a sin : for the notion of ONE Lord of heaven and earth was not fully comprehended by any. It was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they worshipped ; not the God of ALL ; if another tribe appeared more powerful than themselves, it was a natural conclusion that their deity must be more powerful, and they transferred their homage, hoping to win the same protection. Even the first leaders of the Israelites seem scarcely to have acknowledged the universal paternity of their Divine Ruler : this required a farther advance in mental culture than they had attained to ; and we find both Moses and Joshua, instead of appealing to the reason of the

people, and showing them that there could be no other God, arranging, as it were a covenant between the people and the God whom they had vowed to serve, in virtue of which they were to be victorious over their enemies, and prosperous in their undertakings, so long as they paid true homage to their liege lord, but no longer.* Even if Moses had attained to somewhat higher views, it is evident that Joshua and the warriors who followed him, saw in their God only the supreme Power, which had vanquished all other gods; but had not arrived at the point of considering him as the sole Governor of the Universe. We are apt to lend our own refinements in philosophy and religion to other times, and thus to take a false view both of the events and the actors in them; and it is therefore needful to notice this; for it is in this and the like views of religion that we must look for the cause why,

* A rude people rarely views its Deity in any other light than that of a king or ruler holding sway over a certain tribe or region. When a mixed people were brought to inhabit Samaria, they begged to be taught how to worship "the God of the land," concluding that the evils they suffered had been inflicted by him, because on entering his peculiar domain they had neglected to pay him the proper homage. See 2 Kings xvii. 26, 27.

even while paying homage to the invisible Deity, the people of Israel remained fierce and rude in their habits. It was not till the gradual increase of population and of wealth made the contests with their enemies less frequent, and the arts of peace began to be cultivated among them that religion assumed a more spiritualised form.

It was near the time of the Trojan war, as far as we can depend on the chronology of those days, that the tribes of Israel, moved by the example of other nations, called for a king to lead them to battle as a united people, instead of combating in separate tribes as they had hitherto done: and at this period, as far as we can judge from the descriptions of Homer, the difference in civilisation between Palestine and Greece was not great: but one man of extraordinary ability at once raised the Israelitish tribes to a high rank among the nations of the east. The conquests of David are among the least of his claims to renown. His wise government united turbulent and barbarous tribes into a compact and powerful nation, and opened the way to commercial no less than military success: skilful workmen were encouraged, and the materials when wanted, were imported from Phœnicia;

so that he left to his son Solomon a treasure for the building of the temple at Jerusalem so enormous, according to the historian, that even after allowing for a little oriental largeness of expression, it must fill us with wonder that in forty years such a change could be wrought in the state of the nation.* Nor was he great only in the art of government: for his lyric poetry must always rank among the noblest efforts of the human mind. For the first time, in these sublime odes the Deity is depicted in the language of pure religious philosophy:—He is the glorious Maker of Heaven and Earth; the Lord of all Things; the Protector of the feeble, before whom the strength of man is as nothing; and to whom the bloody triumphs of war are unacceptable; who delights in consoling the meek and humble sufferer, and rejects the monarch and the conqueror. In them we find lessons of

* It has been conjectured, not without considerable probability, that the books of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges, were compiled from the ancient records, and brought into their present form, or nearly so, under the reign of this monarch. The notices scattered here and there through these books, that such and such an event happened before there was any king in Israel, seem to imply that when this expression was used there was a king whose government the writer was proud of.

the purest morality ; the insufficiency of ceremonial service is taught ; the true sacrifice of a contrite heart insisted on : and these great moral truths bore their fruit. We cannot but contrast the conduct attributed to Agamemnon in the poems of Homer, when the priest of Apollo comes to him to complain of his violated daughter, with that of David when the prophet of God reproaches him with his seizure of Bathsheba. Both had committed an act of licentious tyranny ; so far we see the general manners of the times ; but how different are the men ! The priest of Apollo sues humbly, and is treated with contempt by a barbarian, who knows no law but his own will : the prophet of God faces the king in all his pride of power and place, tells a simulated tale, which induces the king to give a severe judgment on his own misdeed, and then with the cool courage of one who owns no power above the law, sternly turns upon the monarch with the startling words, "Thou art the man."—Great as was the prophet in his boldness, the king was yet greater in his humiliation : not one word of irritated feeling escapes him ; he bows before the public reproof, and meekly answers, "I have sinned against the Lord."

The people among whom such a scene as this could occur, were already some centuries in advance of the rude heroes of the Homeric poems. Under the successor of David the nation made yet more rapid progress ; arts, commerce, learning, poetry, all flourished in an extraordinary degree, and during a considerable time the Hebrews had a literature such as no other nation can produce at that early period. The connection with Egypt, a thing forbidden by the far-seeing lawgiver of their nation * arrested their progress : the grandson of David, by his despotic measures probably encouraged by his Egyptian mother, broke the band between the tribes not yet so thoroughly amalgamated as to yield to the oppression of one, and Rehoboam retained only the powerful tribe of Judah, of whose kindred he was, under his sway.

But the king chosen by the other tribes had resided long enough in Egypt to make him inclined also to adopt its customs : when elevated to the throne he endeavoured as a measure of policy to break off the resort of his people to the temple at Jerusalem, and the fetiche bull of Egypt which had once been set up by Aaron,

* Deut. xvii. 16.

was again resorted to, as the representative of the Lord of Heaven and Earth. The usual consequence of putting forward the Visible in the room of the Invisible, followed: the people who were rapidly advancing in refinement and civilisation, first stood still, and then retrograded; polygamy, the bane of the east, added its degrading influences, and the mighty nation, whose wealth rivalled that of Phœnicia, gradually declined in power: and though the colleges of the prophets still kept alive the poetic fervour, of which we have some such splendid examples handed down to us, we see no trace in the history of the people of any farther step in advance, either in literature or science, after the time of Solomon.

It is difficult to look with the eyes of common-world policy at the occurrences recorded in books which we open with pious awe: it is owing to this probably that we do not so thoroughly comprehend the state of many of the ancient nations so fully as the documents which we possess ought to enable us to do. I shall endeavour here to give a few of the considerations, which may tend to throw light on Jewish history, which we are too apt to regard as a chain of supernatural events, not at all to be measured by any common standard. It should be remembered that

an unscientific nation is always superstitious, always looking for superhuman intervention, and believing the common occurrences of nature to be the consequences of such intervention, as in the case of eclipses, storms, &c. Miracles to their eyes are things of daily occurrence, every thing that happens is an omen or prophecy; sickness is an immediate infliction of some more powerful intelligence, and is to be cured by a charm or prevented by a talisman: and man under such apprehensions sees himself in the light of a puppet in the hands of unseen influences which he knows not the means of escaping. To such persons a direct Divine interference would have none of the startling effect, which a clearly supernatural event would have in modern times; they had seen such, according to their own conclusions, too frequently to be much moved by them. Hence, notwithstanding the admonitions of the prophets we see the Israelites acting according to their own views of policy; and, as is evident in the instance of Jeremiah, considering those who admonished them as impertinent or seditious men, who wished to overthrow the due order of rank and the established institutions of the country. The philosopher of Greece, and the prophet of Israel were alike in their mission,

and their fate. Neither do we sufficiently consider that the moral are as constant as the physical laws of the universe :—that the same Will imposed both, and that therefore the breach of the one will necessarily have the like ill consequences as the breach of the other. The vices of a nation bring about its downfall by apparently natural causes, but it is because the originally imposed order of the moral world renders this a necessary consequence of infringing them. The very constitution of our nature is such that we cannot imagine, even, any other order. Misfortune follows misconduct as necessarily as fever follows the exposure to putrid miasmata, with only one difference, that moral movements and their consequences extend over longer periods. Thus the history of the Israelites is rather a history commented on by writers who possessed a clear view of this moral order, and pointed out the recondite causes of what they relate, than a narrative of events which at the time they occurred were considered by the actors as differing from what was occurring elsewhere. Prodigies were believed in, and expected by all the nations of the earth, the general had his soothsayer to tell the favourable moment for undertaking an expedition, for giving

battle to an enemy, or for founding a city : and the prophet of the Lord, to whom the Israelitish monarch applied to know if they should go up to fight at Ramoth-Gilead, stood in the same relation to him, according to his own view of the matter, as the soothsayer of the Spartan king at Platæa. The pretence to such powers was so frequent that the real became confounded with the false claim to prophetic power ; and even among those who saw the foretold results follow the word of the prophet, these were so generally such as a wise man would anticipate from his knowledge of the moral constitution of the universe, that even they might fail to be convinced that the warning was Divine, and consider it as nothing more than the far seeing glance of a skilful politician might have discerned. The prophecies of Jeremiah may again be brought forward as an instance of this : the people saw their accomplishment to the very letter, and yet were not at all more willing to listen to him. They probably thought that the publicity of these predictions in a great measure brought about their fulfilment ; and held him therefore to be a mischievous and bad citizen.

There is nothing which more closely marks the Divine government than the difficulty of

distinguishing between the natural and the supernatural: between the *penalty* attached to the breach of the written law, and the *consequence* which we call natural, though it is in fact the penalty attached to the breach of the unwritten law. In human law, which has to deal with a world already formed and in action, the penalty most generally has but little apparent connection with the offence: it is arbitrary: but in the Divine law the penalty always grows out of the offence. The drunkard ruins his health by exciting undue action in the bodily frame: the liar loses the confidence of his fellow men: the idolater debases his spiritual nature, and narrows the powers of his mind by setting up a visible object which presents itself only to the animal senses, in the room of the Invisible Deity, the contemplation of whom exalts the faculties to the comprehension of abstract ideas, and is no less favourable to science than to true devotion and morality. Take the history of the world all through and we shall see, not in the history of the Israelites alone, but in that of all other nations, that the grossness of idolatrous worship led to so general a relaxation of manners that no government could be carried on with effect. Events are to this day preaching

the same lesson ; the tyrant is forsaken in the hour of his danger by the subjects he has oppressed ; and there was probably small difference as to the causes of the fate experienced by Adoni-bezek in ancient times,* and the king of Candy in our own. On the other hand it is the natural tendency of a spiritualized faith which looks beyond this world for its happiness, to give intrepidity under perils, integrity in offices of charge, disregard of temporal interests. It may not always have that influence, because it may frequently be very imperfectly embraced ; but such being the tendency in general, some at least will carry it out in action, and a nation is upheld by the great examples which give the tone to public opinion, and make vice shameful as well as wrong.

After the Babylonish captivity the Jewish nation remained for a considerable time in a depressed state, dependent first on the Persian empire, and then on the Syro and Egypto-Macedonian kingdom, and following, to a certain degree, their system of civilisation. And here it marched nearly *pari passu* with its conquerors, and the Jews of Alexandria were by no means

* Judges i. 7.

among the least accomplished scholars in that school of learning. The different sects of Greek philosophy found followers among this nation, always distinguished by clearness of intellect, and we find a Jew also spoken of as a tragic poet. Indeed at this period the desire to win the favour of the powerful Syrian and Egyptian kings, to whom they were necessarily subject, led to a very general adoption of Greek manners. It is difficult to say to what extent this might have been carried, had not Antiochus Epiphanes, by his tyrannical acts and open persecution of all who yet retained the Jewish faith, roused the spirit of the nation, always warlike, and proud of its former greatness. Under Mattathias, the son of Asmoneus, a priest of high rank, the people rallied round their desecrated altar, and with desperate valour,—guided by the consummate skill of Judas Maccabæus, and the other sons of the aged champion of his country's rights,—achieved independence, and restored the temple worship to its primitive state.* Seldom has patriotism had to record a more glorious triumph: but the wars of the Maccabees

* Judas succeeded to his father, B.C. 166, and concluded a treaty with the Romans, as the leader of an independent people.

were not less ferocious than the other wars of those times ; and indeed the religion of the Jews was so mixed up with their civil polity, that the priest who was first roused to action by the insults to the altar of God, bequeathed the standard of national independence to his sons, who saw in the restoration of the temple worship the triumph of an awakened people over their oppressors.

The talents of the Asmonean family no less than the gratitude of a rescued nation raised them to the throne of Judæa ; and Simon, the brother of Judas, was acknowledged as an independent prince, as well as high priest of the Jews, by Demetrius Nicator, king of Syria, B.C. 142. and John Hyrcanus, the son of Simon, appears to have restored for a time the happiest days of David and Solomon,* but his sons were carried away by the habits of the times, and imitated the Syrian princes in their cruelties, and disregard of law and right. Aristobulus the eldest, on succeeding to the throne, threw his mother and brothers into prison, except one, whom he put to death upon a mere suspicion ; his mother he starved to death in the prison ;

* Josephus, Bell. Jud. lib. i.

and Alexander Jannæus, another brother, who was released at his death, and raised to the regal dignity, having on one occasion, B.C. 86, taken 800 rebels who had held out against him for a considerable time, caused them all to be crucified, and ordered their wives and children to be slaughtered before them, whilst yet hanging alive on the cross. He himself commanded the tables to be spread, and entertained his concubines at a sumptuous feast, in a place from whence the horrible scene could be commodiously viewed. This however was more than men could bear, even in those times; for Josephus informs us* that 8000 of the inhabitants fled from Jerusalem the night after this horrible tragedy was exhibited.

The canon of Hebrew scripture is supposed by the Jews to have been finally settled by the high priest Simon, surnamed the Just, who died about B.C. 292. After this "the traditions of the elders," as they were called, gradually came to be regarded with more and more esteem, till about B.C. 150 they were collected into a whole, as it is said, by Rabbi Judah Hakadosh, under the title of Mishna. This was

* Josephus Bell. Jud. lib. i.

the cause of the division of the nation into sects, which afterwards took a considerable share in political affairs. Those who held the traditions to be equal in authority with the canon of scripture were termed Pharisees: while the Sadducees on the contrary rejected every thing but the canonical books. As early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, B. C. 135, the Pharisees were a powerful party, and enjoyed much favour among the lower classes on account of the appearance of extraordinary sanctity which they assumed. Alexander Jannæus having embraced the opinions of the Sadducees, the Pharisees raised the rebellion against him which he so cruelly terminated; and after his death were powerful enough to sway the government at will, during which time they were the cause of so many executions, that no man held himself safe, and a fresh rebellion was the consequence. The tenet of the resurrection which this sect admitted must not be understood as bearing any resemblance to what is now meant by that word. It was rather a modification of the Egyptian opinion on that subject, that the souls of the good, according to them, being transferred to other bodies—those of the wicked tormented.* A corollary of this

* Joseph. Bell. Jud. lib. ii. As this writer was him-

probably, was their notion that extraordinary diseases were caused by the entry of the spirits of the dead (*δαίμονες* *dæmons*) into the bodies of living men ;* which was rejected as well as that of the transmigration of souls, by the Sadducees.

The disputes between the two sons of Alexander Jannæus were the immediate cause of the Roman interference in the affairs of Judæa, which ended in the appointment of Herod to the sovereignty by the senate of Rome, B. C. 40. He was neither of the royal blood, nor even of the Jewish nation ; for he was by birth an Idumean : that nation having been conquered and incorporated with the Jews by John Hyrcanus. It was not to be expected that a people, proud of so many glorious reminiscences, would readily submit to a stranger of a despised race, although all acknowledged his kingly qualities ; he obtained possession of Jerusalem only by a siege, and the slaughter of his opponents, and even

self a Jew and a Pharisee, there can be no doubt that his information on the subject of their tenets was correct.

* This superstition also had a heathen origin, and is still remembered in the Vampire of Hungary, which is supposed to be the body of a dead person reanimated by an evil spirit, which has then the power of inflicting injury on others.

then found the most powerful faction among the Jews, the Pharisees, but little inclined to submit to him; so that his existence was embittered, and his temper soured, by conspiracies, real or imagined, against his life and power.

The state of Judæa, then, immediately before the birth of Christ was briefly this. The country was divided into two powerful factions besides the immediate adherents of the king, termed by the Evangelists, Herodians. The Pharisees had sunk the moral law under the ceremonial, so far as to make it of none effect; but they were fierce maintainers of the *forms* of religion, and rendered unwilling obedience to Herod, who could not in their eyes be legally their ruler. Their hopes turned to the promised son of David, in whom the royal line of Judah was to be restored. The Sadducees were even yet more intolerant of strangers, and consequently even more disaffected to Herod, while the king himself, burthened with the sums he had to pay to Rome, was obliged to exact heavy taxes, which were especially odious to the people. The nation was therefore ripe for rebellion whenever an opportunity offered itself, and were only restrained by the fear of Roman interference, which would completely have destroyed their independence.



CHAPTER VI.

PROGRESSIVE SYSTEMS BECOME AG- GRESSIVE.

WE have already seen that stationary systems, by rejecting all improvements necessarily remain in a state of semi-civilisation; and though the union of feeling in all classes, which such a system produces, where long habit has fixed each in its place, may give the rude strength of numbers; this must always be triumphed over by science in the end. A stationary country wears its appearance of power till confronted with a progressive one: then, like a house whose timbers are rotten, one part after another falls before the external force, and the rebuilding becomes impossible.

Thus it was with the great Persian empire. It was brought into collision with the active progression of Greece; was shaken by its contest with Athens; received another shock from the arms of Sparta; and fell before the united power of all Greece under Alexander. It de-

served its fate: luxury and wealth had brought with them effeminacy and vice; and the recorded cruelties and licentiousness of its monarchs and nobles justify a presumption that the general manners of the people had at least become tainted.*

Alexander was the impersonation of the progressive spirit: his expedition, like the later ones of European nations, was made subservient to the purposes of science; and the philosophical tutor enriched his work on natural history with the specimens which the soldiers of his victorious pupil had been charged to take for him. It is useless now to talk of what the plans of this great monarch might have effected, had his life been spared: it seems not improbable that he might have some intention of realising what I have elsewhere noticed as the dream of the philosophers of Greece; i. e. an improved state of society, in which talent, and science, and

* The court of Lahore, in later times, may give a very just notion on a smaller scale of the court of Persia of old. We may look at the people of Lahore therefore now, as a representative of the state of the lower classes under a similar system in times past. It is only by a comparison with something almost present to our eyes and imaginations, that we can attain to a comprehension of the facts of history.

worth should give rank ; and in which the governors should seek the good of the people rather than their personal aggrandisement. The world however was not ripe for this, and Alexander's mighty schemes, whatever they might be, died with him.

The kingdoms which arose out of the spoils of Persia which Alexander had not had time to consolidate into one great empire, which he would probably have accomplished had he lived—exhibited a mixture of Median profligacy and luxury, with the Grecian love of science. Egypt especially, under the Macedonian dynasty, made immense strides, and the library of Alexandria formed by the care of the early kings of that race was the resort of the whole learned world. Eratosthenes has already been noticed in the beginning of this work : his labours in the rectification of chronology and other parts of science, which, but for this library, he never could have effected, have made him justly famous, and he may therefore be taken as an example of what the world in general owes to the wise encouragement afforded to learning by the Egypto-Macedonian kings ;* which did not cease even

* Euclides the geometrician, whose treatise is still our text book in that science, adorned the reign of Ptolemæus Philadelphus.

under the worst kings of that race. Hipparchus the astronomer pursued his researches at Alexandria, during the reign of Ptolomæus Physcon, so nicknamed by his subjects in hatred and derision; and other names only less famous than those already mentioned, illustrated the Alexandrian school while the monarchs of Egypt were making themselves hated by their subjects, and contemptible to their neighbours.†

Even the small kingdom of Pergamus which a revolted slave wrenched from a corner of the Syrian monarchy, had its library amassed by successive kings, which was finally transported to Egypt by the triumvir Marcus Antonius to the amount of two hundred thousand volumes. That of Alexandria, before a portion of it was burnt in Cæsar's assault on the town, amounted to seven hundred thousand volumes. This loss

† It was not merely in the school of Alexandria, however justly famous, that science took such large strides in the three centuries previous to the birth of Christ. Berosus the historian of Chaldea, Aristarchus the astronomer of Samos, Theocritus the poet of Syracuse, and Archimedes, whose mathematical knowledge was so skilfully applied to mechanics in its defence; with many others, rendered the third century before the birth of Christ illustrious.

was compensated by the accession of the Pergamean library.

It would be a distasteful, and at the same time a needless task to depict the profligacy of manners prevalent through the countries which had formed, for a few years, the great Macedonian empire. History, to which all have access, makes this sufficiently apparent. It prepared the way for the conquests of a sterner people; which, though it became sufficiently corrupt in the end, preserved itself for some time at least, from the contamination of that Median effeminacy, luxury, and dissoluteness, which had first ruined Persia, and then its Grecian conquerors.

It was about the time when Athens had made its first step towards a democracy, by limiting its rulers to a ten years' archonship, that the foundation of Rome is usually dated, but long before that a great nation, apparently quite as much advanced as Egypt in science and civilisation had occupied a large portion of the country north of the Tiber; which was then called Etruria. The extent of ground occupied by their tombs, tells of a dense population; and the paintings with which, after the manner of Egypt, they are adorned, show, as in the case of that country, much of luxury, and a considerable

proficiency in the arts.* According to Plutarch† this country had, either at or previous to this time, been weakened by an invasion of the Gauls, who had rent from them some cities and territory, and settled themselves towards the coast of the Adriatic.

The origin of both Rome and the Romans is so hid in fable that nothing certain can be known on the subject, but there seems little doubt that they were a more barbarous tribe than those already seated in the country ; and the tradition which points to a migration from Asia is as probable as any. They were evidently few in number, and the tale of the rape of the Sabine women, if it have any foundation in truth, would rather mark a band of rovers accustomed to violence than quiet settlers who were usually accompanied by females. That they were few in number is clear from the mixture of other and apparently earlier settlers in their tribes‡ as well

* Mrs. Hamilton Gray has now rendered this subject familiar to most readers.

† Vit. Camilli.

‡ The three first tribes of Rome were called Ramnes, Tities and Luceres, of which, as would appear from the names of Romulus and Tatius given to the Roman and Sabine kings—the Ramnes seem to have been Romans,

as from the traditional tale of the alternate sway of Roman and Sabine kings, which seems to mark the incorporation of two races in one city: for the Sabines appear to have retained their polity and monarch down to a later period.

Tradition assigns to Numa, a Sabine, the establishment of the laws and regulations of the Roman polity, both civil and religious; but in the absence of any distinct early records it is difficult to say how far the accounts given of this king are to be relied on. Many fables doubtless are mixed up in the traditional tales relating to him, yet the institutions which are generally regarded as his, must have had a beginning; and there seems no reason to doubt that Rome was first governed by kings; for it was the mode of government then nearly universal. We may therefore very well suppose that a monarch of that name might be among the earliest rulers, though the date of his reign may be difficult to fix, and though probably much that was attri-

the Tities, Sabines, and the third, which for a time was not on an equality with the others, is supposed to have been Etruscan, and to have taken the title *Luceres* from *Lucumo*, which was the title given to an Etruscan noble.

buted to him was nothing more than an adaptation of the customs of the surrounding nations to the mixed population which it was desirable to amalgamate into a whole. There is one work however, the Cloaca Maxima, still to be seen, which will not allow us to believe the origin of Rome to have been so mean as that which tradition assigns, or at least if it was, it must have been much less recent: for this great work scarcely yields in boldness of design or solidity and skill of construction to any thing produced by the power and science of Egypt. It is attributed to Tarquinius Priscus, an Etruscan, who is said to have brought Etruscan artists to Rome for the execution of his improvements; but the small tribe, struggling with its neighbours for a narrow territory, which we find described in history, could not have found wealth for so stupendous an undertaking. Was not Rome an Etruscan town taken possession of by a warlike migratory tribe, as some others had been seized upon by the Gauls? Be that as it may, the Cloaca Maxima was neither needed nor built by a small and barbarous population.

According to Plutarch the rising state was undegraded by the idol or fetiche worship of Greece and Egypt. Though temples were built

in which the Divinity was worshipped, he asserts that Numa forbade any image whatever, whether of man or beast, to be placed in them; and that this spiritual worship lasted during a period of 170 years after that king, which brings us down nearly to the date assigned to the expulsion of the Tarquins. Bloody sacrifices were equally prohibited. Numa is also said by him to have endeavoured to amalgamate the distinct tribes into one nation, by forming the people into companies according to their trade or profession: probably this refers to the system of caste which prevailed in most ancient nations, and might have been an Etruscan custom. The institution of Augury is also attributed to him, but this was clearly an Etruscan rite.* About 500 years after Numa is supposed to have reigned, the books on religion and philosophy written by him, and according to his directions buried in his tomb, are said to have been accidentally found by an husbandman, and by him carried to the Prætor; who referred the matter to the senate: but the senators, after examination,

* The law of the twelve tables directs that all prodigies and portents shall be referred to the ETRUSCANS and HARUSPICES. V. Cic. de leg.

ordered the books to be burnt.* Apparently, if this tale be true, the opinions of the ancient legislator did not accord with the then worship or practice: and the senators of Rome were no antiquaries.

If we may credit ancient tradition, science was cultivated in the early state of Rome, Numa is said to have built the temple of Vesta round, to represent the universe with its central fire (the sun): an opinion of the arrangement of the heavenly bodies which was held by the Pythagoreans afterwards, and which seems scarcely to have been doubted till the time of Parmenides, who flourished in the sixty-ninth Olympiad.† In addition to this, several ancient authors give an account of some process by which Numa was enabled to draw fire from heaven: a process tried afterwards by Tullus Hostilius (a Roman by birth), who lost his own life and burnt his

* Plutarch says, that the man used some land on the hill Janiculum, and the rain having undermined the bank, a part fell and exposed the tomb of Numa, with some of the buried volumes, &c. He states this to have happened in the consulate of P. Cornelius and M. Bæbius, B.C. 181, or thereabouts—a period certainly belonging to the historic age.

† About B.C. 504.

palace in the unsuccessful attempt. If this be so, and the tradition is repeated in so many forms that it is hardly to be doubted, the properties of electricity must have been known to a certain extent. A reform of the kalendar is also among the improvements attributed to Numa, whose reign is described as a period during which the arts of peace were cultivated, general good will inculcated, and agriculture, no less than trade, encouraged.

From all this there seems room to conclude that the ancient and more polished inhabitants of Italy were subjected at the time assigned to the foundation of Rome, to the invasion of ruder tribes, who by degrees were instructed in the arts and sciences of the people they had conquered; but these last, being no longer dominant, did not advance in knowledge, but gradually lost ground; and thus the foundation of the Roman empire, like its close, was marked by a period of retrogradation in science and art. As this took place, the usual consequences followed: the Visible and the Tangible again usurped the place of the Spiritual in the minds of the people; and dissolution of manners followed grossness of religious belief.

There are moral epidemics which influence

the fate of nations even more than physical ones: the movements made in advance by one nation usually find a response in all which are following the same road of civilisation: thus the expulsion of the Peisistratidæ from Athens, B. C. 510, was succeeded in the following year, B. C. 509, by the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome. While Themistocles and Aristeides were struggling for power, and calling in the aid of the Demos to forward their views, the Roman plebeians had obtained the concession from the patricians of the tribunate: and the accordance of political rights to the Thetes of Athens, B. C. 478, was quickly followed by the *lex Publilia* at Rome, which gave to the plebeians the right of electing their own magistrates,* and of passing *plebiscita* or *resolutions*; which were in fact the proposition of a law to the sovereign power, with all the might which the approbation of the majority of the people could give it. But the Romans were a sterner steadier people than the Athenians; and dissoluteness of manners did not make such rapid progress among them, although occasionally facts are related which show

* Namely, that the Tribunes of the people and the plebeian Ædiles should be chosen by the comitia of the tribes, and not of the centuries.

how much of the licentiousness of a semi-barbarous state. The senate acted as a check to the growing power of the people; and Rome continued to advance towards greatness by slower, but more certain steps than Athens. That this last state however was, in some measure, the model proposed to itself by the rising republic, may be judged from the traditional fact that the Roman people deputed legates to Athens in the time of Pericles, B. C. 449, in order to obtain a copy of the laws of that city, which copy, together with some other laws of ancient usage, is supposed to have formed the foundation of that of the twelve tables.

As early as B. C. 508, Rome had made a treaty of commerce with Carthage, and though reduced to great difficulties by the invasion of the Gauls, B. C. 389, we find in B. C. 345, another treaty with Carthage, which shows that its commerce was far from contemptible. The religion of the state was by this time become completely idolatrous; for when Veii was taken by Camillus, he is reported to have removed the statue of Juno from thence to Rome; the consent of the goddess, as some writers report, being visibly declared: but we hear nothing of the gross rites of Egypt and Greece till B. C.

186. In that year the Consul Posthumius upon discovering these new abominations,* addressed the Senate on the subject; referring to former decrees made to restrain foreign rites, &c.: from whence we may conclude that, notwithstanding some corruptions, a simpler worship than that of surrounding nations had been preserved; and that these decrees had as much a view to the preservation of the morals of the people, as to the uniformity of religious rites.

The law of Licinius Stolo, B. C. 366; that no one should hold more than 500 jugera of land, which he himself afterwards evaded so as to hold 1000, may give some notion of the property possessed by the higher classes; this was increased by the lending on usury, which had been so exorbitant that it became necessary to restrain it, first to ten, and afterwards to five per cent. In Rome, as elsewhere, the debtor became the slave of the creditor if he was unable otherwise to discharge the debt; and thus the lower classes, who, from being obliged to do military service, were often compelled to neglect their farms, became involved in difficulties from borrowing

* V. Liv. l. xxxix. c. 16, where the crimes of the people are fully described.

money to carry them on. This was a fruitful source of embarrassment to the governments of ancient times : for when slaves are to be had for menial service, none hire labourers : the free poor therefore had no means of subsistence, but that of possessing a small portion of land ; which, nevertheless, afforded a very unsufficient maintenance. Hence the continual demands of the people of Rome for a division of the conquered lands among them, and their willingness to serve in the armies which were to increase their conquests, a circumstance which must be taken into account in all ancient warfare, and which made the lust of power somewhat more rational, so far as self-interest is concerned, than it can be in modern times, at least in Europe. Slaves and land were acquired by a successful campaign. The Romans followed the practice of the times in their first wars, and enslaved the inhabitants of the towns they took by assault : but after a time a wiser policy prevailed, and the fate of the conquered cities was considerably alleviated.

One of the reasons perhaps why corruption of manners spread less rapidly in Rome than in Greece, was the greater respect paid to the virgins and matrons of the republic than had ever

been bestowed in any Grecian state, save Lacedæmon. Roman females mixed freely with men;* and until the coarse rites of an idola-

* The account given by Livius of the proceedings with regard to the Bacchanals before mentioned, affords so good a notion of the state of manners in Rome at that time, that it may be useful here to give an abridgment of it. One P. Æbutius, the son of a Roman knight, had been placed in the guardianship of his mother and her second husband, which latter, having, with the connivance of his wife, mismanaged and embezzled the estate, they together contrived means of getting rid of him, which they thought to effect by persuading him to be initiated in the rites of Bacchus, where under cover of mysterious religious rites, all kinds of violence were perpetrated. The young man lived in the intercourse of affection with a courtesan, a freed woman named Hispala Fecenia, and having communicated to her his intention of being initiated, she was struck with horror, having, whilst a slave, attended her mistress to these rites; and she obtained his promise not to allow himself to be initiated. The young man in consequence refused, and was turned out of doors by his mother and her husband. By advice of his aunt Æbutia, to whom he applied, he went to the Consul Sp. Posthumius, and privately told him the whole affair, upon which the Consul bidding him return after three days, proceeded to visit his wife's mother, Sulpicia, a discreet and excellent lady (*gravem fœminam*) and asked her if she knew Æbutia, who lived on the Aventine hill. To this she answered that she knew her well, as a woman of high integrity, and one who lived after the ancient manners. He bade

trous and sensual worship had corrupted both sexes, the marriage tie was respected, and the mother was the friend and guide of the son. Po-

her send for her, and when he judged her to be there, dropt in, as if to pay an accidental visit, and turned the conversation to the subject of her young nephew, Æbutius. Finding that she confirmed all that the young man had said, he next begged Sulpicia to send for Hispala, for he had some questions to ask her also. Hispala was exceedingly alarmed when she found herself sent for by a lady of such distinction, and more especially when on arriving she found the lictors and the consul's train in the vestibule, and soon after saw the Consul himself. Half dead with fear, she was taken into a private apartment, where the Consul, in presence of Sulpicia, told her that she need not fear if she told the truth, and that both he and that excellent lady would be her guarantee. When she found that what she had told her lover was known, she fell at the feet of the lady, and begged that a private conversation might not thus be brought forward, at which Posthumius growing angry, told her that she was not now to fancy that she was talking with Æbutius—she was now speaking with the Consul in the house of a lady of distinction. And Sulpicia at the same time endeavouring to allay her fears, she was finally induced to tell all she knew. Having done so, she entreated that she might be sent away from Italy to escape the vengeance of the people she had denounced — but the Consul assured her that she should be safe in Rome ; and at his request his mother-in-law emptied an apartment in her house for Hispala to remove into. It was in the upper story, and the stair-

lygamy appears to have been unknown ; though in later times divorce was practised to an extent which greatly corrupted the morals of the higher classes at any rate,—probably of all.

A progressive state is almost necessarily an aggressive one. Any great advance in commerce and power raises the jealousy of neighbouring states, which then only await what they

case to it, which had communicated with the public street was shut up, and a way opened to it from the interior of the mansion. Hither her effects and family were transported. Æbutius himself was sent to reside with one of the Consul's clients, and when both the witnesses were thus secured, Posthumius laid the whole affair before the senate. In conclusion, the Bacchanals were punished capitally : the places where the Bacchanalia had been celebrated, demolished, and a law made that no ceremony in honour of Bacchus should be celebrated without giving notice of it to the city Prætor, and then under very strict superintendence. Æbutius and Hispala were both rewarded by a public gift, and a decree made that the former should be exempted from compelled military service, and that Hispala should have liberty to alienate or diminish her estate, to marry whom she pleased, and to choose her own guardian, as much as if these privileges had been conceded to her by will. Also that she might marry a free husband without any degradation to him who should marry her. The Consuls and Prætors were charged with the care of her safety, and the decree having received the consent of the people, was passed into a law.

deem a good opportunity for crushing it : and it was thus that Athens was obliged to put herself at the head of the movement party of Greece almost in self-defence ; but the rapid spread of political corruption, which followed that of morals in that extraordinary country, paralysed its force ; and its mission into the world was suddenly cut short. Rome ran the career of Athens, but in a much longer period, and however great might be the physical force of that great republic, its moral force was yet greater, for its stern virtues afforded a hope at least of justice. We, at this distance of time, think of its ambition and occasional acts of tyranny, but the people of those times saw in the Roman power a refuge from the despotic cruelty of their rulers, and hailed the appearance of the commissioners of the republic as the means of obtaining a redress of grievances ; nay, looked to the condition of a Roman province as a considerable improvement in their situation ; for then their complaints would be heard by the senate ; and in that great state no man was above the law.

What Roman senators were in their best days, may be judged from the conduct of the ambassadors sent to Alexandria, when Ptolomæus Philadelphus, after Pyrrhus had been driven from

Italy, sent to ask their alliance.* These upright men having been presented by him with crowns of gold at an entertainment, accepted them that they might not seem to show any disrespect to an ally; but in the night placed them on the heads of the different statues of the king which adorned the city: and having again been presented with rich gifts at their departure, they delivered the whole over to the public treasury upon their return. The senate however in testimony of approbation of their conduct, which thus rendered the Roman name honourable in the eyes of surrounding nations, decreed that these gifts should be restored to them.

We can hardly wonder that such integrity won the esteem and confidence of both king and people, and that even without particularly seeking the office, the republic of Rome should have become the arbiter between the contending potentates. The abominable debaucheries and misgovernment of the rulers of those countries which had once formed a part of the great Macedonian empire, corrupted as well as alienated

* About B. C. 272, the envoys were Q. Fabius Gurgæ. Cn. Fabius Pictor and Q. Ogulinus. V. Liv. lxi. c. 47.

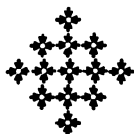
their subjects ; an improved system of military tactics gave the Roman armies as much advantage in the field as a purer administration of justice did in the council, and one after another of these kingdoms sunk and became provinces of the new Empire ; which during its bright period had gained a force which all its after corruptions could but slowly undermine. Yet even during this bright period there was a taint of barbarism, both in the times and the people. The wars of the Romans were cruel, their government severe, and we have at least one recorded instance of human sacrifice, and an allusion to others ;* a terrible declension from the bloodless ceremonies of their earlier worship.

The relation which has already been alluded to, of the first introduction of the Bacchanal rites, shows a considerable decline at that time in the severity of Roman manners ; for 7000 women as well as men, persons of good family and consideration in the state, are said to have been guilty of these horrible depravities. When the women so implicated were of a rank to make exposure grievous to the family, they were de-

* Liv. lxxii. c. 57.

livered into the hands of their relations to be put to death privately; others, men and women, were executed publicly: but even this fearful severity could not stem the torrent of corruption which was now setting in from surrounding nations; and Cato the Censor in vain struggled to restore the simplicity of ancient manners, and even men of senatorial rank were disgraced by him for licentiousness and general immorality: one of them, L. Quinctius Flaminius had borne high office in the state: his crimes were too offensive to be here repeated. The rapid downward progress after this hardly requires to be noticed. It was about B.C. 100, that Marius was in the height of his power; in B.C. 88, or thereabouts, that he and Sylla struggled for the mastery. The political causes which led to the final overthrow of the republican form of government must be sought in other authors who have treated on the subject more at length: my limits will not allow me to go into these sufficiently to satisfy either my readers or myself; and my business lies with the moral rather than the political history of mankind. I promised, when I began, to take such a survey of the world as should give some notion of its state when the great event occurred, which makes the gulf be-

tween ancient and modern history, and I have now traced cursorily, but faithfully, the progress of the most influential states of antiquity up to the last century previous to that event. It remains that I now knit the whole together by a general survey of the state of the civilized world at this period, which shall be the subject of the next chapter.





CHAPTER VII.

SUMMARY.

TWO causes may be assigned for the dissolution of manners which was so general a short time previous to the commencement of our æra ; namely, first, the sanction universally given by the laws to slavery as a part of the social system : and secondly, the gross and sensual worship which appears to be a necessary part of polytheism.

Without reckoning the hindrance to the advance of science and civilisation resulting from the habit of enslaving the whole population of conquered cities, regardless of station or mental attainments ; the very elements of society are tinctured by this system ; and the wholesome gradations, which leave no wide gap between one class and another, are lost. The soldier taken in battle, the peaceful inhabitant of a conquered town, and the unfortunate debtor were equally reduced to a state in which all human rights were denied them : they were

chattels, at best only protected as in England we protect a horse or an ox from cruel mutilation. It was not possible that persons placed in such a situation should long retain any of the higher feelings of our nature; and if we go back to the dramatic exhibitions of the ancients, we shall see that a slave was held to be invariably a dishonest, sensual, lying, despicable coward; the ready tool of his master's vices. What then was likely to be the character of the master himself who had always persons at hand to perform his bidding, be it what it might;—who could enforce their obedience by severe punishments;—who could hear the cries of his fellow creatures under the lash without concern, and order its infliction as a matter of course? for we find it recorded as an instance of self-command in a philosopher, that he would not punish a slave who had misconducted himself, because he felt angry, and therefore feared he might exceed due bounds. Yet when men are degraded by the laws to such a depth of misery, no motive but fear could have influence; and stripes became, in consequence, almost needful to enforce the unwilling service. Instead therefore of the honest labourer, who in the independent sanctity of his domestic hearth finds all the best

instincts of man awakened and hallowed, the states of antiquity had only the slave, who had nothing left but gross sensuality to console him for labour, hard fare, and blows. Art flagged for want of intelligent workmen, and refinement was impossible. The fate of the female slave was even worse than that of the male, and the consequences more demoralising.* The system was a cancer eating into the very heart of society.

On the other hand the religious ceremonies had by degrees become a source of frightful immorality. We have already seen how the simple theism of the earliest times yielded step by step to the evil influence of caste, which made religion the business of a separate class, that found its advantage in veiling the truth, and amusing rather than instructing the people. The consequences showed themselves very soon in Egypt first, and then in Arabia, Greece, and other countries. The populace measured the deity by the rites,—how gross they were I leave others to describe,—and themselves by the deity

* Those who wish to know how the system operated have only to read Plautus. Its action and reaction on both sexes, and all ranks, are there sufficiently apparent.

thus pictured to them. Whatever excess they committed might find a ready excuse in the mythological tales current among them.*

It was not in human nature to be satisfied with this state of things ; especially when leisure and wealth promoted the advance of science. The mind never begins to deal with the one great problem of existence without very soon asking itself, — “ Whence comes it that any thing is, or that I am here to investigate the causes of it ? ” There was nothing in the tales of mythology which could satisfy these questions, and the enquirer at once pushed them aside as fables, and sought for the truth. How well it was found when sought for, has been partly shown

* Plato's *Euthyphron* gives a notion of how this might be done ; perhaps he makes use of a little exaggeration ; but if such arguments had never been brought in excuse for immoral actions, the philosopher's wit would have had no point. He represents Socrates as meeting a young man at the door of the hall of justice, and asking him his business there. He says, it is to lay an information against his father for the death of a man who appears to have perished whilst kept in confinement by him for murder, awaiting the legal officers to take cognisance of his crime. Socrates wonders at the son's eagerness to accuse his parent, and the son justifies himself by the example of Jupiter's treatment of his father Saturn.

elsewhere;* for it was not in Judæa alone that the human race was taught to form nobler ideas of the Maker of all things; nor were the Jewish prophets the only men who preached righteousness to their fellow citizens and to the world. I need hardly now refer to the reform in religion and manners, effected in various countries, by persons whose names have descended with deserved honour even to our times; such as Pythagoras and Charondas in Italy; Confucius in China, Zamolxis in Thrace, Zoroaster in Persia, and many others who stemmed the tide of corruption for a time, and again gave a voice to the moral law written in man's heart, and the religion which his reason, when duly cultivated, must acknowledge. The One Deity, "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," was again preached, and for a time obeyed: the philosophers of Greece began a new æra of thought for the civilised world, and idolatry and polytheism were thenceforth confined to the vulgar and uneducated, or to those of the higher orders who had not courage enough to think for themselves.† Statesmen nevertheless for the most

* Vide a Brief View of Greek Philosophy, forming Nos. V. and VI. of the present Series.

† Nicias, the unfortunate General of the Athenians at Syracuse, was one of these.

part protected the popular superstition as a useful engine of government, and submitted to a mummery in public, which they inwardly despised.

This forced the philosopher into being a political, no less than a religious reformer: the public institutions were bound up with a false and demoralising faith; there was no hope of amending the one without changing the other; and hence when not called in as legislators, and allowed to model the government, as in the case of Pythagoras at Crotona, and some others, they were charged with entertaining views hostile to the existing state of things, and subjected to pains and penalties accordingly. The banishment of Anaxagoras, the death of Socrates, the persecution of Protagoras, of Stilpo, of Diagoras and others, at last made their pupils more cautious: their doctrines were communicated in secret, and in some degree accommodated to public opinion.* Thus the masses were not improved, though their leaders were; and even among the higher orders, the sort of compro-

* As in the case of Epicurus, who professed that he knew nothing about the Gods; that they might exist, but that they did not interfere with man.

mise they had made between conscience and expediency exercised an evil influence on the character. They despised the superstition without clinging, with the firmness of men, convinced of the truth, to the opinions they had adopted. Thus receiving on the one hand speculative truth with an assent which their reason could not refuse, and bending on the other to what they deemed a political necessity, even their own lives did not win for the truth the admiration which was its due. Alkibiades and Kritias had been the pupils of Socrates.

A further evil resulted from this compromise between truth and superstition. It was not possible that the people should be blind to the utter indifference of the higher classes to the fables and ceremonies which they sanctioned by their acquiescence in them; and very soon the reverential feeling with which these ceremonies had been regarded, vanished from among the populace even. The sacrifices were regarded only as a pleasant means of obtaining a good meal,* and the ceremonies as an amusement, which offered also a respite from labour; but the

* Xenophon reckons the sacrifices among the means of conciliating the populace. Athen. Repub. c. 2.

gods whom they had brought down to their own level, were regarded only as boon companions with whom they stood nearly on an equality. No better faith was taught them—their superiors appeared to have none,—and they, as a sort of necessary consequence, became animalised to the utmost point, and careless of every thing but sensual pleasures.*

It is impossible to read ancient history without seeing that this process went on in every nation where polytheism prevailed; and though the states which had consolidated the elements of their greatness under a purer system resisted for a time the progress of decay, it was not the less sure; and one empire after another exemplified the truth of the view here taken. Public, follows private immorality, as surely as plants which have grown in the shade produce flowers and seed when the sun reaches them: and public immorality weakens the hands of government, and ends,—how often have we seen this even in our own times!—in the complete dissolution of the empire which can no longer find enough

* The bet made with Hercules by an individual, of a supper, &c.; which, on losing, he fairly paid in the temple of God, may shew in what kind of estimation these deities were held. The story is well known.

men of integrity to administer public affairs honestly and courageously.

In the century preceding the commencement of our æra, every empire and kingdom of antiquity which we have any knowledge of, had in this manner succumbed; vanquished rather by their own vices than the Roman arms. Philosophy, which had once spoken the lessons of virtue and wisdom, had degenerated into a system of idle questions on subjects of no importance. Epicureans and Stoics, far from imitating the gentle or the stern virtues of their respective masters, did little else than calumniate each other, and disgrace the names of Epicurus and Zeno by vices which later times have unjustly imputed to the first teachers, rather than to their unworthy followers. Here and there a gleam of philosophic truth illumined some gifted mind, like that of Cicero; but only to render the surrounding darkness more visible: the vices which had ruined all the other states of antiquity had fully established themselves in Rome also; the republic was the slave of its own army, and an odious and bloody tyranny was established.*

* For further information on the subject of Rome, I beg to refer the reader to "a History of Rome by Dr.

In Judæa the pure morality of the prophets was superseded by the cold formalism of the "traditions of the elders;"—which had stifled the religion of the heart, and substituted for it a calculating hypocrisy, adopted to win the respect of the vulgar; or a fierce bigotry which clung to the ceremony rather than the substance of religion, and dishonoured the law by a furious intolerance, while attempting, as was supposed, to do it honour. Glance as we will over the world at that period, from one side to the other; from the bloody idolatries of the northern forests to the disgusting rites of the inhabitants of the tropics, we no longer find an oasis in the wide spread mental desert: a few scattered individuals groaning over the decay of all that was great, and virtuous, and lovely in human nature, were all that remained; and truly might it be said, "I beheld, and there was no man" * capable of restoring the world from the depth of degradation into which it had fallen. The task was hopeless for human power. It was then, in the fulness of time, when man had done his utmost

Leonhard Schmitz, in one volume, price 7s. 6d.;" the best work of the kind which I have ever seen.

* Isaiah xli. 28.

and failed; when "the whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint," that ONE, to all appearance a poor mechanic, undertook the regeneration of mankind, and—EFFECTED IT! All the blessings of science and civilisation; the decencies, the security, the happiness of life which we now enjoy, may be traced to that one event: and though, as will be seen in the sequel, the throes of that regeneration were terrific, yet whoever studies history cannot but acknowledge that the advance of the human race under the Spiritual System has been as constant as, and more rapid than the deterioration under the Sensual. Egypt took three or four thousand years to sink; and now, in less than two thousand, and notwithstanding the long period of dreary slavery under an unchristian power, not yet wholly shaken off,—it has arrived at a higher point in many kinds of useful art, and general decency, than in its most palmy days: and this merely by the juxta position of Christianity.

The world has learned its lesson: never again can a sensual ceremonial system be established: our thoughts, our views, our objects, are wholly changed, and a different and a higher principle is acknowledged as the foundation of all legislation. But let us not mistake the past: Chris-

tianity did not teach a lesson wholly new to individual minds; the wise and the good of all ages had argued out for themselves enough of its great truths to live virtuously, and to die with the hope at least, of a blessed immortality. But these truths had had very little share in the government of nations: here and there, for a time, a small community adopted a purer system, but more frequently the preacher of righteousness stood in opposition to the laws, no less than to the corrupt customs of the people; and too often had to pay with fortune or life for having dared to raise his voice against the prevalent corruption. God had "not left himself without a witness" in the breasts of men; but in the senate, or on the throne, his laws were neglected for some miserable substitute, which the prejudices, the ambition, or the covetousness of the governing powers had set up in their place. It was this which threatened to perpetuate the degradation of the human race. The moral law was not unknown: an apostle of Christ could hardly have uttered a purer doctrine than Cicero addressed to those who had yet ears to hear, or a heart to receive it, only sixty years before the birth of the Messiah. But how was this doctrine met?—The age was

too profligate to endure the reproofs of the moralist—the country banished the Consul who had saved it from plunder and massacre: the licentious Triumvir issued his mandate for the death of the man under whose rebuke he had writhed: and the last Roman worthy of the public confidence perished with that stroke. Well might the Holy Spirit say, “I looked and there was none to help, and I wondered that there was none to uphold”—and well was it for us that he deigned to add, “Then mine own arm brought salvation.”* A GREATER than Cicero was needed, and He came; but it was not to be expected that in such a state of things as has been described above, a different fate should attend him: it was not to be expected that the proud, and at the same time corrupt rulers of the Jews would hear with patience their hypocrisy, their ambition, their grasping covetousness, unmasked and rebuked. The preacher of the Truth who dares to proclaim it openly to a corrupt majority, must always prepare himself to be the victim of his boldness: so it has been in all ages; and so it must be till the maxims of

* Isaiah lxiii. 5.

Christianity are fully those of the world. But it was no longer a powerless individual who now poured his blood for the cause of right and justice: those who had fled from *the man* when suffering the vengeance of unjust rulers, found their courage rise when they saw the ascension of *THE GOD* from the earth he had deigned to reclaim as his own. It was in vain that threats were used, and penalties inflicted; they were powerless to silence the voice which proclaimed the message of God to man. Nor was it a message alone: the pattern of all that was lovely in human nature had been exhibited to the world, and those who had loved and admired the man,—and who that saw and heard him did not?—counted it gain and glory to fulfil the mission of the *GOD* who had deigned to assume a character so calculated to win their affections. When “to die and to be with Christ” was the object of their ambition, what human force could prevent his disciples from doing his bidding? Thus the work went on:—as long as the ruling powers opposed, none professed Christianity who were not enough influenced by its doctrines to be ready, when the occasion came, “to shed their blood for their Saviour, as he

had shed his blood for them ;” * and when the earnestness of purpose which persecution had secured in the early Church, gave way to the indolence of hereditary faith, the governors of the people had already become the Conservators of Christianity in form if not in spirit ; and the perfect example which they acknowledged it to be their duty to follow, shamed them into enacting laws which maintained the doctrine, even if they found it hard to walk in the steps of Christ. The moral law was acknowledged as paramount, and gradually the legislator found himself obliged to remodel his code upon purer principles.

The great work is still in progress ; and who that wishes well to mankind would desire to arrest it ? Yet strange to say, there is hardly any fundamental principle of Christianity that has not been opposed by prejudice till it has engendered a fierce claim of right on the part of the oppressed class, and the law of love, and the religion of peace has had to be enforced by men with arms in their hands ; while those who had no arms, or could not use them, had to suffer still in spite of the professed

* Tertullian so expresses it.

Christianity of those who claimed the authority over them. This should not be:—legislators should not wait to be terrified into concessions; times and circumstances alter, and laws of course must alter with them; but the Christian legislator should go farther, and have a higher object:—he should endeavour to train immortal beings for happiness, by giving all the freedom of action consistent with the maintenance of society, to every class; male and female, young and old, rich and poor; and to make this possible to a larger extent every day, by rendering intellectual culture easier and more general. This is the object of Christianity: when God made the human race responsible agents, he taught at the same time that all must have the liberty of spontaneous action, or the making them so was a piece of cruel tyranny. It is not my business here to enter on a review of the laws of this, or any other country, or to say how far they accord with this great principle of Christianity; but this I do say, that though the laws of Europe may have acknowledged Christian principles to a certain extent, and though many steps have been made of late years towards a truer appreciation of what those principles are; there is no country which would not be rendered

happier by a revision of much that they hold "time honoured" and venerable; and it is not now, when every throne in Europe quakes to its foundation, because this has not been done, that this assertion will be denied. Let us take care, then, that England, at least, shall give freely, and in time, what a Christian monarch and a Christian senate cannot withhold without sinning against that God before whom no distinctions are known; before whom "there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female." *

* Gal. iii. 28.

THE END.

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